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CROWDS OF THE BIBLE

REV. W. H. JELLIE

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CROWDS OF THE BIBLE.

BY THE

REV. W. H. JELLIE.



LONDON:

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DEDICATED,

As a REMEMBRANCER of past work, to valued friends in Rochester, whose love and devotion continue unabated notwithstanding the preacher has ceased his ministry among them; and

As a FORETOKEN of labours to be rendered in a ministry hopefully begun and happily pursued among a beloved people in Gosport, at whose request these studies are given to the press.

WILLIAM H. FELLIE.

Gosport, January, 1873.

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ERRATA.

Page	20,	line	28,	*for* "remedial"	*read*	remediable.
„	23,	„	5,	*omit* "it."		
„	50,	„	9,	"inseperable"	*should be*	inseparable.
„	76,	„	29,	"menancing"	„	menacing.
„	140,	„	16,	"iuterest"	„	interest.

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A CROWD. It presupposes some object of attraction, some incident of popular interest as the occasion for drawing the people together. The study of a crowd, therefore, involves an enquiry into the cause which simultaneously excited a large number of persons, and affected them so powerfully as to win them from the pressing occupations and current claims of life to meet in wondering, eager concourse. Scripture crowds are of peculiar interest as pourtraying occasions and occurrences of such import as to stand out prominent in the spiritual history of man and be found worthy of record in the Book of God. And, as all Bible crowds are found associated with incidents of a religious character, it follows that to study those crowds will bring us into direct contact with some of the most significant events and momentous crises which have entered into the career of the human race.

A crowd has something of intense awfulness about it. Look on the swaying mass of life; listen to the mighty hum of voices; watch that sea of changeful faces. What romance and tragedy, wretchedness and levity, ambition and despair, conquest and defeat, are represented there in various stages of completion! Could the veil be lifted and the hidden life of that crowd be thrown open to vision—its passions, loves, struggles, wrongs, sins and aims—O what a scene on which to gaze! What a sight must it present to the eye of God! Think how each unit in that vast concourse is a distinctly individual thing, having its own personality, being the centre

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of its own world of sorrows and joys, possessing a home of affection and bliss or the reverse, having lived through a career whereon are traces of guilt or goodness, being vested with power to inflict or alleviate misery, each one hurrying on through the turmoil of life to the shadows which linger round the tomb; yet an immortal thing, with imperishable interests, related somehow to God, having been sought by Jesus to the very Cross, and now going on to the judgment and the issues beyond. Our Lord "beheld the city, and wept over" the throngs of people gathered therein; it is scarcely possible for us, who can see in a crowded place so very much less than must have been open to His gaze, to refrain from tears. A crowd is a solemn sight. It will suggest to thought the one great crowd, when all kindreds of the earth, great multitudes which no man can number, summoned for the judgment, shall stand before God.

The crowds of the Bible selected for study are those thought to be most representative and suggestive.

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I.

The Crowd around the Ark, scoffing at Noah.

IN that early age of the world we must not look for such crowds as pour into modern cities on great occasions. But here we find the first allusion in Scripture to the fact of a concourse of people. "Men and women began to multiply on the face of the earth," [Genesis vi. 1.] and to settle together in large numbers. In that fact we have the material for a crowd, and in the building of the ark the exciting cause of their coming together.

When we recall to mind the vast interest which was felt only a few years since in the building of the "Great Eastern" steam-ship, and this even in an age of grand naval triumphs, we cannot be surprised that the unequalled novelty of such a structure as the ark, its grotesque shape and immense proportions, should have drawn together in

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those simpler times an excited and astonished crowd. The "Great Eastern" is some one hundred and forty feet longer than the ark was (680 feet as against 540 feet), yet as the sides of the ark were continued in the same line to the extremities, the ends being as broad as the midship, it would have a more bulky appearance than the great modern vessel whose lines fall in with graceful curve, thereby diminishing her apparent length. But, while the ark was shorter, its width was greater than that of our monster vessel by about seven feet (90 feet as against 83 feet). Then, as the ark was flat-bottomed, its whole height would stand out to view, presenting an elevation of fifty-four feet. The "Great Eastern" is six feet higher, but as she falls off towards the keel at the water line, her magnitude is again less evident, and the ark would seem to be both loftier and more massive. It is estimated that the ark was over 81,000 tons burthen, would carry—if compared with a war-ship of the make of the "Victory"—20,000 men, 2,000 cannon, together with military stores and provisions for the men for twelve months. Altogether the ark must have been an object of amazement and eager curiosity to the crowds gathering around to gaze and to scoff.

Attention is here arrested to the fact that

I.—*Crowded places are scenes of prevailing wickedness.*

"The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." [Genesis vi. 11, 12.] Where people congregate in large numbers there it is we find evil in its worst forms. How strangely contrasted are village life and town

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life! That there is sin everywhere, and in well nigh every form, is too sufficiently proved; but rural simplicity and purity are thrown into fascinating prominence as contrasted with the gaiety, voluptuousness, and abandoned guiltiness of our cities. Young men who have left the cleaner paths of their country dwelling-places for the foul ways of London life or residence in one of the great centres of population have found the crowded scenes strangely defiled and defiling. Sin revels where there are crowds.

Why is this? Because the wrong-doer is more screened and iniquity is less noticed where the scenes are thronged. The thief, who will not hesitate to snatch your watch or purse, and dash from your sight into the midst of the surrounding mass, finding secresy amid the multitudes, would not venture to risk himself in such a deed with only a few bystanders near. What you would not dare do in a village because there you would be at once detected and your evil brought home to you, has been done unhesitatingly and unblushingly by many when finding themselves more screened from notice in populous places. O beware of the ensnaring influence of a crowd, and bethink yourselves of your individuality among the mass and your responsibility before the watchful God.

The force of example and of custom also goes to explain the depravity of crowded scenes. There were some men of mark, called here "sons of God," [Genesis vi. 2.] who led the corruption of the land; and then the people followed. Just as an iniquitous court makes a guilty nation; or wealthy families in a city may demoralize the whole people. It is easy to fall in with the general state of things and manner of

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life which prevail. Individual goodness gets drowned in the surging roll of sin; at least, he must have a brave spirit who vanquishes the wrathful waves. But, hard though it be to maintain integrity against the influence of example and of numbers, shall we excuse ourselves in evil because it is only what everybody does? "Be sure your sin will find you out." "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished."

II.—*Prevailing iniquity forces godliness into distinction.*

So from amidst the general evil there rises into view, Noah! For where sin abounds either you must conform or become at once conspicuous. Therefore in the sad story of the corruption of the land we light on this testimony; "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." [Genesis vi. 9.] Do not imagine it was easier then for Noah to live above surrounding sin than it is for the godly man to-day. It must have been difficult and arduous for him to hold on in his integrity and piety, when as yet God appeared not for his vindication, against the ribaldry and scorn of the age. Be sure of this, that Noah was ridiculed at his work and hated for his righteousness. And if you suffer derision and ill-usage because you refuse to conform to the guiltiness of others and will strive after virtue and live to God, then remember that the world's scorn places you in company with all the best and bravest souls who have ever ennobled earth by their lives.

It is a grand thing when a man is seen to stand out from, and by his purity and godliness rebuke, the vice and carnality of the crowd. It is an act of true heroism. And there are

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Noahs who are doing this in every crowded scene. Young men who from loyalty to conscience and to Christ are not afraid to face the daily jeers of companions; young girls also, who in the work-room have bravely put to the blush those who revel in gay conversation. It is no easy attitude to assume: but for God and for Jesus there are thousands who thus "come out from among and separate themselves" from the ungodly, at the cost of friendship, favour, and peace. Lonely lives amid the crowded scenes, lonely in their goodness and their piety, hated for their very difference and often persecuted also with the scoffing and scorn which are designed to wound the heart. Brave souls, God help you, that you may be steadfast as the rock which casts back the angry waters that foam around!

III.—*The omniscient God had been watching all this.*

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt." [Genesis vi. 5, 12.] "For the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the *evil* and the *good*;" the prevailing evil and the solitary instance of goodness. He loses sight of nothing, of none. Think you: vice and wickedness are not the less hateful to God because they are screened among the crowd. To you it may look less to do wrong when everyone else does it; but the Holy Lord loathes it, loathes it in each individual; and "God is angry with the wicked every day."

O come and read here how God hates evil. That scene of general corruption on which He "looked" so affected Him that even in the Divine heart, full though it is of piti-

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fulness, there arose this thought—"I will destroy them!" [Genesis vi. 13.] Yes; "the soul that sinneth it shall die."

Still the one good man amid the crowd was not overlooked and classed with the mass. "Noah walked with God;" and so, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." [verse 8.] As a lily among thorns, so bloomed this holy soul: and that Eye which is ever "strict to mark" the beautiful and the good, lingered lovingly over this one pure life: and lo! not only should he be saved from the destroying, but the method for his deliverance should constitute Noah a type of the Coming One, who would create for His loved ones a Church wherein to enclose them from the "world of the ungodly," and shelter them from the doom of the disobedient.

The intention of God to destroy man, because "all flesh had corrupted his way," created the necessity to provide escape for this one "perfect" life. It was the Divine purpose to do this in accordance with a prayer breathed by Jesus in after years, not by taking him out of the world, but by keeping him from the evil. Noah must be saved from the deluge. Hence arose the scheme of the ark. "Wilt Thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Nay! Follow down the years, and see how the God of grace, "who warned Noah of things not seen as yet," that he might "prepare an ark to the saving of his house," later in time "gave His only-begotten Son," and in Him provided redemption for His people. Thus does He remember those who are His, and save them that trust in Him.

IV.—Wherefore, out of that remote age, with its guilty multitudes, on the very scene of their revelry, *there now rises*

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into view this novelty,—the ark. "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them from the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it." [Genesis vi. 13—16.]

Slowly it rose, for the task was immense. Do you think that the daily sight of the ark rising into form ought to have startled the multitudes into apprehension for themselves, and repentance towards God? Alas, "Every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil *continually*;" more correctly, "only evil *every day*."

Before the world is now set the coming deluge of fire: and yet men heed not the Divine monition and scorn the prophecy. We need not wonder therefore that the crowd around the ark should scoff at Noah. It is only like an ordinary crowd, mournfully typical, treating the plan of salvation with derision. Even as the multitudes turned from Jesus and mocked around His Cross. "He was despised." "We neglect the great salvation."

That antediluvian crowd would watch the building of the ark and scoff at its absurdity. Think you how they would laugh at Noah as they saw him toiling heavily to bring

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together the "gopher wood," the mighty beams, amazing quantities of timber, and materials for the strange structure. And as the monster thing grew into form, how would they rate and taunt him as to its hideous shape and prodigious size, and ask him if he intended to put the world inside! Built also, as it was, some distance inland from any river or sea, can you not realize with what irony they would enquire if they could bring him a little water in which to float his ugly ark, or whether he intended to launch it on the next rain-drops that should fall. There was sufficient reason for their bantering, deriding as they did Noah's idea of a flood: for how should that massive, ponderous thing ever be lifted from the plain on which he had built it and carried down to the ocean? O noble faith, that laid him open to perpetual ridicule in the event of the flood never coming. There would stand the immoveable ark, a lasting satire and occasion of shame. But he believed God, and "moved with fear, prepared the ark."

Then also the crowd would gather around Noah when he preached, and scoff at his warnings. For he was "a preacher of righteousness" [2 Peter ii. 5.] to those godless crowds. And what could seem more unreasonable than his threats of an approaching flood? His admonitions would be taken for the ravings of fanaticism. Not very different the conduct of that old crowd from what prevails in modern times. "There have come in these last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the

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word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word being kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

V.—Meantime, while the crowd scoffed, think on that *grand and compassionate pause*, the pause Divinely arranged between the announcement of the flood and its fulfilment. "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." [Genesis vi. 3.] One hundred and twenty years allowed for the human race to repent! The deluge might therefore have been averted as was Nineveh's doom. During all that term "Noah preached righteousness;" lived a just life, and thereby shamed their licentiousness, and, "moved with fear, prepared an ark, by which he condemned" the improvident and heedless world. [Hebrews xi. 7.] But the one hundred and twenty years pause, full though it was of prophetic warning, led to this: not one person was turned from sin to God! All this time God's Spirit did strive with man; but without one solitary instance of success. How is this known? Thus: not one was taken into the ark with Noah and his house. So mournfully did that crowd trifle away their season of grace—as so many are still doing who through a long life turn away from the hope of the Gospel—and were frivolous amid impending doom. "They did eat, they drank, they married wives and were given in marriage, until the day Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came."

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It is to this gracious pause of one hundred and twenty years that Peter alludes when speaking of those "who sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." Instead of eagerly embracing the hope held out to them, they bantered Noah at the long delay of the flood, and were "disobedient" to the voice of warning and of grace. And there is a gracious pause once more Divinely arranged for men. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness;" the judgment tarries, not because God's purpose of the great overthrow is vacillating, He delays its fulfilment because He is "longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." O can it be that we, like the crowd around Noah, shall fritter away the years of hope?

At length the ark was finished, the one hundred and twenty years expired; then see

VI.—*The crowd around the ark, watching Noah's entrance.*

"And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark, for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation. And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the flood. Of clean beasts and beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of everything that creepeth upon the earth, there went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah." [Genesis vii. 1, 7—9.]

The people had seen him busily occupied for one hundred and twenty years rearing the monster thing, and many had been the scornful laugh over the old man's credulity and

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folly, wasting energy he could ill spare at his advanced age, for his six hundredth year was reached ere the work was done, wearing the months away in tedious labour while they made merry with life: and now, lo, he begins to remove all his family into the ark. What more insane? It stands there like a huge prison; will he entomb his household in the hideous thing while as yet no sign even of rain rises on the heavens? The climate is hot, the ark must be stifling, but, faltering at nothing, he will involve his children and children's children in any discomfort rather than abandon his fanatical project. Yet, more astonished far, they watch this crazy old alarmist drive into the ark, where already his household is imprisoned, beasts of every variety, unclean and clean, savage and tame, birds too and creeping things, crowding it with creatures repulsive as co-residents with human beings, collecting together a motley concourse such as never before were made to consort, and in his rashness and imbecility compelling his family to make companionship with them. "Well, let the old man play his mad scheme out!"

A week longer of opportunity while this entrance into the ark is being effected [chap. vii., verse 4.] and then, "*the Lord shut him in.*" [v. 16.] Yes, even as we read, "And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut." Thus shut in, think you how the foolish crowd would gather around the ark shouting and jeering! Fools that they were! And as you are who, refusing salvation yourselves, make mock of those who are *within the ark*, "kept by the power of God unto salvation."

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But lo! a sudden change falls on the scene—and on the crowd! Quick as thought "were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven opened." [chap. vii., verse 11.] Then see

VII.—*The crowd around the ark, clamouring for admission.*

Not scoffing now. "O let us in! Give us shelter! Quick to our cry. Haste, for delay is death! What, no entrance? We shall soon be overwhelmed; the storm is furious; the waters come in a deluge; open to our appeal; we want refuge, O let us, let us in!"

In vain. "For many I say unto you will seek to enter in and will not be able when once the Master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door; and ye begin to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity." "Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind."

"As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day came that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Watch therefore!

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(a) Noah building an ark amid a jeering crowd, illustrates the man, concerned for his salvation, providing for the future, seeking a refuge in the Saviour, and, therefore, scoffed at by the reckless! We may be fanatics for "preparing an ark." The worldly have ever called those such who seriously bethought them of future needs and "neglected" the "pleasures of sin" rather than the "great salvation." But time will show. The pause speeds on!

(b) Noah warning the crowd of the coming flood, but listened to with scornful incredulity, represents the preacher of the approaching judgment of the world, jeered at as an alarmist, being asked, "Where is the promise of His coming?" and bantered with its long delay and seeming impossibility. But, like Noah, the preachers of righteousness "have been warned of God of things not seen as yet;" and, therefore, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, cry, "Flee from the wrath to come!"

(c) Noah entering the ark amid the laughter of the crowd, also illustrates the awakened and obedient soul quitting the world, abandoning earthly scenes and pleasures on which Divine doom has been pronounced, and *entering the Christian Church*, thereby incurring the derision and annoyance of the wicked. Yet blessed the soul of whom it is said "the Lord shut him in." "Therefore he need not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

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(d) Noah within the ark when the flood came, and the crowd without clamouring to enter, pourtray the dreadful scene, when, while the redeemed of the Lord shall be gathered safe into heavenly rest and joy, the wicked will be without Saviour or shelter from the awful storm. "Upon the wicked God will rain snares, fire and brimstone and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup." "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place."

Thus, at the flood, we read, "And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark." [Genesis vii. 23.] "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." [2 Peter ii. 5.]

It is coming! the flood of fire is nearing! O "*come thou into the ark!*" Stand not among the scornful. There is "a place of refuge and a covert from the storm and the rain." We shall need it. The pause will soon be over. The deluge will burst ere long upon the ungodly world. Flee ye therefore for refuge to lay hold on the Hope set before you!

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II.

The Crowd beneath Sinai, waiting for the Law.

WE sweep through an interval of a thousand years and another crowd arrests us; and so we pause before the "Mount of God;" beneath which Israel's hosts were spread awaiting an experience far different from that which overwhelmed the crowd around the ark. The world's destruction by the flood pourtrays the natural and inevitable doom of lawlessness; the giving the law that man might be preserved from declining into such utter lawlessness again presents to the world the plan of righteousness.

The solemn sweep of majestic granite mountains which lay grouped together in the centre of Arabia was called by the collective name "Horeb:" the highest and most awful peak was Sinai. The Israelites, journeying through the wilderness of Sin, came upon that rugged mountain range,

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and encamped among them, sheltering and resting in the enclosure of those grand heights. By Divine appointment they cast their tents at the base of Sinai, whose splendid and terrible form rose with overshadowing awe above them. The mountain lifts itself some 10,000 feet above the level of the Mediterranean sea.

Coming amid the spreading concourse of Israel, Moses announces that on the third morning the Holy God will appear in glory before the gaze of His chosen people, His foot resting on the brow of Sinai. [Exodus xix. 9.] An announcement this which filled the people with eagerness and amaze. From tent to tent, which lay about the mountain base like gleaming snow-flakes, see how the awe-inspired Israelites pass and repass, all talking of what should be, trembling yet hoping as the sublime event drew near. The appointed morn arrives, all the vast assembly have crowded together, their faces are steadfastly set toward Sinai, and drawing nearer as terror fled they watch the mount expectant. When across the clear heavens a lonely cloud is seen to glide, it pauses over Sinai, touches the mount, encircles its brow with a mysterious lustre—it is the chariot of the Almighty. Even as at the last day He shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Intense as is the people's excitement, they hush their very hearts with fear: when suddenly there burst upon them resounding peals of thunder, and amid the terrific roar which ceases not they see the vivid lightnings play about the mount and sweep its lonely sides. All this on Sinai's peak alone, solitarily agitated, the surrounding heights being silent witnesses of Sinai's wonders. Then, with startling

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shrillness, a trumpet note springs from amid the blazing cloud which rests on the mount; "louder and louder" grows its cry as it rolls forth from the dread symbols of Jehovah's presence, overmastering even the thunder's mighty din, and holding the amazed crowd in breathless suspense; swelling into yet greater fullness till nature trembles as with an earthquake and all hearts are stricken with terror. A new marvel succeeds: From out that glory cloud on Sinai's top there begin to pour volumes of smoke lustrous and fiery, which wrap themselves around the lone peak, and then the whole group of the Horeb heights rock and sway with awful heavings. "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled." [Exodus xix. 16.] Called nearer by Moses at God's command, "they stood at the nether part of the mount." Then in a rush of flame, "a fiery stream going before Him," God descended on Sinai, and the mount "was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire." By all these attendant wonders how are our thoughts urged forward with solemn anticipations of the "last trump," the mighty thunders, the "flaming fire," the quaking rocks, and the upturned faces of men watching for God!

"Prepare, my soul, to meet Him."

Then from the mysterious glory there proceeded a Voice; and Moses was summoned by Divine bidding to ascend the cloud-robed mount. Obeying, he disappeared from the people's sight amid the splendour and the smoke, soon to

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return to fence the mount lest the people from curiosity, impatience, or presumption should venture too nigh. Returning into the sublime seclusion of Sinai, Moses received from the lips of Deity the law of righteousness contained in the ten commandments. No sooner had that awful Voice ceased than the marvellous thunderings and lightnings burst forth with renewed energy, "and all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw, they removed, and stood afar off." [Exodus xx. 18.] Appalled by sights and sounds so awful they sent up their cry to Moses that he would go for them to God; for as for themselves they could not live if Jehovah's voice was heard by them again. No assurance from their leader of the Divine intent towards them being gracious could again win them near the mount. Resolutely and terror-stricken, "the people stood afar off;" and it was left to Moses to ascend the mount on their behalf; therefore he "drew near unto the thick darkness where God was." [Exodus xx. 21.] And in that solemn retirement, into which he now went a second time, he received the "judgments" respecting minor duties which were to rule their conduct, and the social laws which were to be distinctive of them as a "chosen nation." [Exodus, chapters xxi., xxii., xxiii.] But as yet the law had not been given on the "tables of stone," only Moses had heard God utter them. It was to receive these that, being called by the Lord, "then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel;" [Exodus xxiv. 9.] and behold, robed in resplendent majesty, treading "a paved work" as of gorgeous sapphire,

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so brilliant that it was as though the entire "body of heaven," all the glowing lights of the firmament, had concentered their lustre on that blazing floor; there "they saw the God of Israel." Higher into the mount Moses was summoned, with only Joshua, his minister, attending him; where, wrapped from human sight, he dwelt with the Most Holy. Six days and nights rolled slowly on, and still Moses abode there, but day and night alike did the whole people behold the brightness glow around the mount and the brilliant cloud crown it. Shining through the day "above the brightness of the sun," O how dazzling its lustre when night fell on the tents of Israel! Amid the darkness, this mount all ablaze, glowing fiercely, illumining the vast, outspreading wilderness with a strange, unearthly glare, and lighting up every face of that amazed crowd. For "the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel." [Exodus xxiv. 17.] The seventh day came, and Moses was called into yet nearer approach and more secret intercourse, and there alone with God he abode for "forty days and nights."

Meanwhile the people, tarrying beneath Sinai, waited for the law. Turn we our thoughts to that crowd; and consider

I.—*The crowd beneath Sinai, forbidden to approach the mount.*

Ask we the significance of that prohibition? It declares man's natural unfitness to come near the Holy God. Sad indeed that this is true; man being guilty cannot stand in His sight. Where the Lord is, only the Divinely sanctified

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may come. He "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto." "Who, then, shall ascend the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place?" If so on Sinai, then on that "holy hill of Zion," in that world of celestial purity and beauty where God dwells unveiled, only the holy may enter. Though He was robed from open vision in dense clouds on Sinai yet might not they draw near; how then shall any appear before Him where no cloud intervenes to break the fierce light which encircles His throne?

"The spirits that surround Thy throne, may bear the burning bliss;
But that is surely their's alone, since they have never, never known
A fallen world like this.

But how shall I, whose native sphere is dark, whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable appear, and on my naked spirit bear
That uncreated Beam?"

Yet Moses entered the glory. It is then possible for man to dwell with God.

"The sons of ignorance and night, may dwell in the Eternal Light
Through the Eternal Love."

It is not that we are excluded from His presence by Divine unwillingness to receive us, but wholly by our sin. In us lies the wrong. But is our sinfulness remedial? May we be fitted for abode with the Holy One of Israel? Moses was. Even so then may we be sanctified; for, though naturally unfit, "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son,

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cleanseth us from all sin;" and we may be presented "faultless before the presence of His glory."

It was true that sin forbade man's approach, so that the crowd might not come where God was, yet equally true it is that, notwithstanding their sin, Jehovah yearned towards them. He came down from "the High and Holy Place" to Sinai, approaching the people; and because He would speak to man, for He wished them to "hear and live," He fitted Moses to come near Him on behalf of the people as mediator. [Exodus xx. 19, 20.] Even as He gave Jesus to be "the Mediator of the new covenant," the Daysman betwixt us, that He might lay His hand upon us both, and appear in the presence of God for us.

Only one of all that crowd did rise into near approach to God. The multitudes to this very day are still "beneath the mount," under its doom, dreading its terrors, shrinking from its glory, afraid of its law. Even as Bunyan's Christian "stood trembling" before Sinai, and did "quake for fear." But wherefore should this be? Ye souls who sink before the mount, crushed by its awful demands, bethink you that your Mediator is above pleading for you with God. Through Him the soul may now rise into the glory.

II.—*The crowd beneath Sinai, called there by Jehovah to receive the law.*

It was an act of Divine pity and goodness. True there is nothing we like less than law, for it condemns; yet the world needed God's law so greatly that the giving it was an act of mercy and grace. All had gone out of the way, had lost the sense of right; man knew not what was ruining his soul and excluding him from God. So obliterated was the

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moral instinct in him, so falsified were his ideas of truth and duty, he was calling evil good and good evil. It was time that He, from whom man had so erred, should teach the world what was right. In our degeneracy we naturally gloss over sin till sin ceases to shew itself to us as exceeding sinful. This process had been going on through those thousand years after the flood; man was losing the Divine idea of right. And, had not the law been given to check this moral decadence, the loss would have soon become complete and the human race sunk into utter degradation and destitution. God checked it.

Before man fell he needed no code of law, his own true and good nature was a sufficient "law to himself." When sin marred that nature, he lost his perfect conscience, and thus was left without an adequate guide. God gave the code to supply this lack. The law, therefore, was a merciful concession to a fallen race, and a timely help to man. "For by the law is the knowledge of sin." We dislike the law because it convinces of sin; but calamitous would have been our case had Jehovah left us without aught to tell us of our guilt and warn us of its doom. In ignorance we should then have walked on blindly, self deluded to hopeless loss. To be shewn our sin is the first step towards deliverance.

We value the Gospel above the law. We do right. But we should not have valued the Gospel at all had not the law been first given. Then it came on the world as "good news," the announcement of a "better covenant." We should not have known or felt our need of atonement and a Saviour had not the law shewn us our helplessness to be

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ourselves "just with God." There we saw that personal righteousness was high, we could not attain unto it: but "what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the flesh" accomplished it. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law." Therefore is the Gospel "glad tidings." "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ."

The giving the law was therefore an act of Divine grace, an installment of the Gospel, which ought to awaken human gratitude, as the beginning of the great plan for opening a way back to righteousness and God.

III.—*The crowd irreverent amid all the solemn associations of Sinai.*

Could it have been imagined that with all the gleaming tokens of Jehovah's nearness and awful proofs of Divine power, there, beneath that very Sinai which was still smoking and burning visibly in their gaze, the people would have abandoned themselves to sin! More dreadful was their iniquity since it was God's graciousness to them which detained Him on Sinai's peak. If solemn scenes and resplendent revealings of Deity could ever make a heart holy, surely they would have availed then. But men are not made the better by sublime sights; the heart is not won to God by majestic displays of His glory. Not all the burnings, brightness, and beauty witnessed on Sinai had changed that crowd one whit.

Heaven's scenes are solemn, full also of Divine glory. Would the guilty be better, be made holy if admitted there? Yet are there those who plead that all should find entrance; that its freedom from sin would act with purifying effect

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upon them, while also the sight of God would wholly restrain each thought of evil. Remember, that heaven would be no heaven if wrong were there. And if the unholy people revelled in crime under the very shadow of the mount, is it to be thought the purity of heaven would make the defiled pure? Their presence therein would wreck all its bliss; it would become, what that scene beneath Sinai became, a place of revelry and sin. Holy places do not make sinners holy. To frequent here on earth the "holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High" has never in itself sanctified a soul. Residents amid nature's sublimest scenes are in no wise restrained from depravity by these resplendent witnesses of God. Men of science, who can intrude into the most awe-inspiring discoveries of the Infinite Majesty of Deity, have not become reverent even by the solemn visions they have beheld.

Besides the sublimity of Sinai there were alarming terrors which at first held the crowd in arrest and dismay. But they soon forgot their terror and gave themselves to sin. We are told that the terrors of hell will check and change the guiltiness of the guilty, and thus necessitate their release. That revolting scene beneath Sinai refutes the hope. Outer influences, whether of sublimity or terror, work not the purifying of the heart.

There are multitudes around us in England living amid Divine witnesses and warnings, who yet are as defiled and degraded as that crowd beneath the mount. The whole world is guilty, yet "that which may be known of God," His "wrath against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men" is manifest to them, "so that they are without

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excuse." It is often pleaded that men would revere God and obey Him, being held in awe of Him, were He in supernatural ways to reveal Himself now to the world. He did this on Sinai, and yet "the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them." [Exodus xxxii. 7, 8.]

IV.—*The crowd impatient, yielding to carnal and debasing pleasures.*

Week after week passed while Moses was alone with God. His very absence should have held them in awe knowing he was away on their behalf, receiving the words of the Lord for them. But "when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." [Exodus xxxii. 1, 6.] Thus did they abandon themselves to the barbarous carousing and wanton licentiousness which accompany heathen festivals. So soon do solemn impressions die away, where the heart is not renewed.

There was a time in your career when your soul "stood trembling;" when you cried "Woe is me!" because of some Divine revealing; but now, where are your solemn feelings?

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"Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

Like as Moses passed from sight when he ascended the mount, Jesus has gone up into the heavens. Instead of looking for his appearing, reverently awaiting His return, men doubt that He will come again and yield themselves to corruption and sin. And alas! all this, while they know and ought to think that the Mediator is with God on their behalf. Look at the crowds. O what scenes degrade the earth from which Jesus has gone but "a little while," soon to return. Men spend the interval in reckless mirth. "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

V.—*The crowd elevating their own follies into idolatry.*

It is not surprising that, their minds being stupified by sensual indulgence and having utterly "corrupted themselves," they should have lapsed into idolatry. A carnal life, look at its portrait; "the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." What pitiable frivolity; what a travesty on the nobleness of man! O how degrading is indulgence! It lowers the life into a thing of scorn. He "sits down to eat and drink" in base self-gratification; and he rises up to what? To do something which shall at least be worthier of himself? Nay, he will break from his low revelry, only to rise up "to play." And this contemptible life is that of a man! Such a demoralization may lead to anything mean and debased. It led this crowd to idolatry; the deification of their own lusts.

Gold worshippers, idolaters of fashion, votaries of pleasure, do not *you* venture to scorn that crowd. They who indulge

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a passion, be it what it may, will soon make it their god. They who ignore the facts of Sinai and its law, will sink as low as did those "corrupted" Israelites. "Keep yourselves from idols."

And see what they were willing to do and part with for their gods. "The people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears." [Exodus xxxii. 3.] They could not restrain themselves to simply wait as an act of homage and obedience to the True God, but could give up their choice and cherished trinkets for their idol. Sin asks more than God asks; yes, asks more of our possessions, as well as steals from us our dignity, purity, peace, and hope of Divine love. It impoverishes the life, degrades the heart, destroys the soul.

VI.—*The crowd thus incurred the anger of an insulted God.*

But for the eager intercessions of Moses He would have consumed them there. "And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." [Exodus xxxii. 9, 10.] But they were spared in answer to the mediator's plea. Then Moses descended from the glorious mount having the tables of the law. O what a mockery; to bring down the Divinely written law to this defiant, lawless host, abandoned to bacchanalian revelry! "And Moses said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger

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waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." [Exodus xxxii. 18, 19.] And there amid the profane crowd they lay in fragments—broken, as the laws had all been by their sins.

Pale and alarmed the people shrank back as he moved in fiery haste through their midst to where their idol stood; the song and the dancing ended. Then with brow dark with wrath he seized the thing of gold and beat it to dust. Summoning the sons of Levi, he bade them unhesitatingly to smite the revolting idolaters to death with their swords; and "three thousand men" fell. So beneath the wrath of Sinai all transgressors shall fall.

Did not they deserve it? What had not God done for them! Delivered from Egypt, saved through the Red Sea, preserved throughout the desert, and now visited with law and grace on Sinai! And "God hath done great things for us." "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy; of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?"

VII.—*The crowd divided beneath Sinai by the call to godly decision.*

"Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him." [Exodus xxxii. 26.] In the name of the God of Sinai this is still asked of man. The multitudes throughout the world are divided at this call. To respond is to escape the sword. "And the Lord said unto the man clothed with linen, Go through the midst * * and set a mark upon the foreheads

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of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others He said in mine hearing, Go ye after him, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity, * * but come not near any man upon whom is the mark." [Ezekiel ix. 4—6.] That call to decision, set before the people life and death: it was in their power to determine their own experience. The many chose the evil, refused God, and died. "There fell of the people that day about three thousand men." All this was indeed a sad waiting for the law. But yet further notice that

VIII.—*The crowd having received the law, resolved on obedience.*

"And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." [Exodus xix. 8.] Such was their declaration when Moses rehearsed the ten commandments which God had spoken to him. When on his return from his second retirement with Jehovah he "told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments" respecting the social laws God had given, "all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." [Exodus xxiv. 3.] Yet, their reiterated resolve notwithstanding, they soon failed. "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them." [xxxii. 8.] Those broken tables of stone lay there beneath Sinai rebuking their violated word. When again the Lord sent down His servant Moses from the mount with the "two tables of testimony" on which once more He had written "the words of the covenant, the ten commandments," the people received him with a deeper

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awe, and were silent when they heard the law rehearsed by him; [xxxiv. 29—32.] not now confidently avowing their resolve to obey. Humiliating failure had made them fearful.

Many since that day have attempted confidently an obedience they have not succeeded in fulfilling. All the efforts of humanity have gone to prove that "by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified." Like that shrill trumpet which sounded "exceeding loud" from out the appalling splendour of Sinai, leading the people to cry to Moses, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die," [xx. 19.] so has conscience uttered its piercing call to the soul attempting self-justification by obedience, waxing "louder and louder" until the spirit has trembled, and fled in terror from the mount. Thus convinced of impotency to keep the law, men needed the plan of righteousness developed and completed at the Cross. Groaning and helpless they looked for the Saviour. And "by the obedience of One many were made righteous." Therefore now there is offered to you not a law engraven on stone whereby to learn how to attempt righteousness, but righteousness itself is offered, completed for you, wrought out by Christ, free to all who will receive it with faith. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

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III.

The Crowd on Mount Carmel, choosing the God who answered by Fire.

CHOOSING a god? Had this people then never heard of the Lord God, merciful and gracious; the Everlasting, Creator of the ends of the earth; Israel's Saviour and King, that now they must make a choice, from many, of the god they will revere and obey? This crowd on Carmel were direct descendents of those who, assembled beneath Sinai, beheld the splendid revelations of Jehovah and heard His voice. True, seven hundred years had rolled between; but eighteen hundred years have gone since the world saw Jesus, yet time has not led us to ignore His claims or to forget the supremacy of His name. Those seven centuries with Israel were, however, marked by a continuous spiritual decline, till the people became so lost to the significance of the Sinaitic manifestations as to be in a condition so low as

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this—choosing a god. It was not, therefore, that they had never heard of our God; nor had they been left in imperfect knowledge of Him; for "theirs were the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, and the fathers." Yet, though all advantages were theirs, they had need of being anew convinced that "Jehovah, He is the God." It is indeed as sad as strange that after the incidents on the Mount of God this scene on Carmel must be enacted and proof given of the supremacy of the Lord. But what is even their case to ours, who have in common with them all the advantages of Sinai, added to which are the wonders of Carmel they had not then seen; and, surpassing all, the manifestations of Calvary; and still there are who live as if the Lord were not God!

Judgment overtook the apostate nation. For in Sinai's law it was written, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." Being provoked to anger by their unfaithfulness, three years of drought were sent upon the land. "And Elijah the Tishbite said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." [1 Kings xvii. 1.] So severe did that drought become that "Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts." [xviii. 5.] And forthwith, under the pressure of sore distress, the king himself divided the land with his chamberlain and explored the country in search of nourishment for the royal horses.

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From the suffering and want consequent on this drought Elijah was miraculously exempted. "The word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook." Thus was the prophet of God nourished through the first year of famine. Thence he was sent to Zarephath; where the widow's "barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." For over three years was Elijah Divinely sustained while the land languished and the people endured utmost privations and distress. "In the days of Elias the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land." "There was a sore famine in Samaria." [1 Kings xviii. 2.]

That the guilty Ahab was furious against the prophet we cannot wonder, for in him the king saw the agent of all this misery. Throughout every nation and kingdom he sent messengers seeking him, with intent to slay him; and so fiercely did he set himself for revenge on Elijah that wherever the search failed, "and they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found him not." It is the old story; "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth." Yet notwithstanding the malignity of the king, "the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab!" A dauntless courage was in that man of God. So he went. For a godly soul is a stranger to

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craven fear. The good of all ages have ever had to brave malice and wrong, but with a Divine intrepidity have stood the cruel assaults of worldly hate, and thus shown that godliness is the most heroic inspiration which can stir and sustain the soul. Therefore, meeting Obadiah, the prophet sent him to his king with these words, "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." The chamberlain faltered, pleading that the prophet might disappear ere the king could be brought to him; who, incensed by disappointment, would certainly turn all his cruel displeasure on Obadiah. Then "Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah:" with impetuous haste doubtless, fired with a mad glee that at length he might gratify all his hate on this prophet of God.

Yet when they meet, how does the king's heart quail! He faces Elijah, with less of kingly courage in him than dwells in the prophet. The calm, fearless eye with which Elijah confronts him makes him half a coward, and the sternest thing he can say to this man, whose death he has sought with such tireless rage, is, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" For in that holy man's presence he finds his conscience smitten and his hand paralyzed. Contrast the king's faltering address with Elijah's fearless charge. "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." [1 Kings xviii. 18.] But since you, the faithless king, charge on me the "trouble" which has befallen Israel, and I return the charge with

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vehemence on you, and on your idolatry, let it be put to the proof. "Now, therefore," bring it to a test. Then in authority which the haughty Ahab even could not dispute, did the prophet dictate what the test should be. "Send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of Astarte four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table."

It is surprising that Ahab accepted the challenge; but he obeyed, and "sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel." The people came in teeming concourse, excited and wondering. Soon on the scene came the long line of vested priests; and, after these, the king in his royal chariot and in gorgeous array suited to his natural vanity; and all stood breathless in suspense. Then amid the great assembly came the hoary prophet, doing homage to no human dignity; and, standing forth in the people's gaze, broke the painful stillness with the grand but testing cry, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Silent remained the king, silent the priests, silent the mighty multitudes. "And the people answered him not a word." [verse 21.] Those priests, who ought to have championed their gods against the pretensions of Elijah, stood irresolute, as if in their hearts fearful to risk the test; for reason enough had they to dread the ordeal. There is some show of probability that the four hundred prophets of Astarte were absent from the scene, having by some means avoided the unwelcome risk; doubtless through Jezebel's influence, in whose grace they found ready shelter.

None responding to the prophet's challenge, Elijah takes the case into his own hands; and turning from the cowardly

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priests of Baal, addressed the people: "I am alone; for I only remain a prophet of Jehovah; but these priests number four hundred and fifty. Can they fear to meet a lonely witness of God in solemn test? I, the Lord's prophet, demand a trial. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God." Whereupon from the vast crowd rose the approving cry, "It is well spoken." [verses 23, 24.] Compelled by the popular verdict they could not but accept the challenge which now Elijah urged upon them, addressing the prophets of Baal in direct appeal. "And they took the bullock which was given them;" as men driven on against their wills. For all eyes were on them, and the crowd stood waiting the issue of this grand encounter between the one holy prophet of Jehovah and the craven priests of Baalim.

The scene of this great trial was at the same time propitious and imposing. Once on Carmel's sacred height had stood "an altar of the Lord." Where was it now? There; lying in ruins at Elijah's feet. [verse 30.] A mute witness to the fact that Jehovah had been deserted, even as His altar had been desecrated and destroyed. Aforetime, Israel had worshipped God there; now the shrine lay "broken down." It was Jezebel's deed, who sought to wipe the great Name of Jehovah out from the memories and from the land of Israel, and to bring in Baal and Astarte instead.

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Lifting up our eyes from that desecrated altar we look forth over the plain of Esdraelon. Behind us lies the Mediterranean, washing the mountain base on its western side; direct in vision, to the south west, stands the city of Jezreel, in which were conspicuous not Ahab's palace alone but the idolatrous temple which Jezebel had reared. Thus were now within view of the concourse of people Jehovah's shattered altar, which the guilty queen had demolished, and Baal's proud temple, which Jezebel had erected; the one, God's broken altar on Carmel, the symbol of a faith which had been deserted; the other, Baal's gleaming temple in Jezreel, the shrine of a faith which the nation had espoused. And there stood the lone prophet of God by the destroyed altar; and arrayed against him were the king in his chariot, four hundred and fifty priests of Baal, and the countless multitudes of people who had apostatized from the old faith to that which the idolatrous queen had introduced and fostered. It was a splendid occasion; a majestic trial; and we invite those who deny God and those who divide with Him to ponder the incident.

I.—*The people had been seduced into idolatry by court corruption.*

Ahab, a vain, selfish tyrant, led anywhere by a passion; Jezebel, an abandoned woman, an idolater, a creature in the hands of her priests; such was royalty. Nursed in the queen's household, idolatry thrived vigorously, and priest-craft became powerful through the land. "Like priests, like people." And there have ever been priests ready to shape themselves to any creed which would suit the royal favor and keep the royal patronage. And thus the religion, false or true,

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or the irreligion, of the palace, sends its influence, through priests, who are the mere satellites of royalty, down upon the life of the nation. English history has shewn how the occupants of the throne have given to the priests their faith and the people their worship. What is favoured in the palace becomes fashionable in court circles; state-priests will not long scruple to accommodate their creed to the occasion; and then the royal religion will cast its spell over the souls of the abject people; and so spiritual seduction goes on.

Yet there were "seven thousand in Israel, whose knees had not bowed to Baal." [1 Kings xix. 18.] Unseen amid the degenerate multitudes there are loyal hearts, true to conviction and God. The Lord has His hidden ones in most apostate times, who live unto Him, like flowers blooming away from general gaze, yet throwing up their fragrance direct and alone to heaven. It is a proud thing to belong to the small seven thousand in any age, who resist the ensnaring favour of royalty and hold their souls firm in supreme fealty to Christ; moulding neither their faith or worship for worldly smiles or gains, constant in their steadfast refusal to "bow the knee to Baal."

II.—*The crowd swayed by uncertainty concerning the true God.*

"How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." There was not then a total abandonment of Jehovah for Baal; but a "leaning on both sides;" a divided heart. Now the worship of the people went to Baal alone, for the Lord's altars were overthrown; yet Elijah implies there was a leaning in part towards God, even though they gave Him not their

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worship. This is easily accounted for. Ahab had so perverted the nation that Jehovah was outwardly deserted. But into their midst came the prophet of the Lord, chiding them for their apostasy; though seemingly without effect. The famine followed as a Divine chastisement, yet Baal was worshipped; but surely, though the people had not ceased their idolatry, this calamity must have shaken the national faith in their "gods," and forced on their memories the warning words of Elijah. Besides also this ministry of the prophet which continually brought back their thoughts to God, there was a conscience in the people which could not but retain something of Sinai's law though it was never now read in their synagogues. Yes, and there were memorials of Jehovah, and of their former faith, scattered throughout the land, "broken down" it might be, yet uttering their witness notwithstanding. The people were thus held faltering in uncertainty, leaning on both sides.

But this leaning towards both was unreasonable, ridiculous. Either Jehovah is God or Baal; but not both! There cannot be two supreme beings; one supreme alone is possible; and the highest is God. Two gods no soul can have. Whoever, whatever is chief, is God. Self, reason, pleasure, passion, power, or gain; but not one of these *and* Christ. "Christ is not divided;" and there may be no compromise. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema." And yet O how many are "halting between two opinions!" not indifferent towards spiritual truth, not void of strong feeling in religious questions, but withal not prepared to accept the great alternative, God or

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Baal. They answer the call to decision with nothing more positive than "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

III.—*The crowd entreated to let their spiritual duplicity end.*

Decide who is God; then follow the One Lord. Jehovah and Baal, the One a Spirit, calling His worshippers to what is lofty and holy, the other an idol, carnal and debasing; they are wholly irreconcilable, and lead their followers to contrary ways. To hold to Baal is to abandon the Lord. "He that is not with Me is against Me." Either God or "the god of this world," the Bible or rationalism, faith or scepticism, Christ or ceremonialism, Protestantism or Romanism, Jesus only or "without Christ," thorough Christians or not at all. But no duplicity! "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" There stands a rival near every heart, disputing the Lord's right of possession, some personal indulgence, some doubtful project in life, some alien doctrine, some cherished object of love; it only asks to share the affections; but God will desert the scene of dispute, or possess it alone.

Alas! we fear that the sympathies of the age are shifting from Christianity and the Gospel, as this nation had declined from God the Lord. "The priests of Baal" are "many," teachers of delusive doctrine are on all hands; to follow whom is to turn from the "old paths wherein is the good way." High time it is this degeneracy of faith should be arrested, this duplicity should end; and the choice of "the

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One Lord, the one faith," be made anew. Need there is for some prophet of God, "in the spirit and power of Elias," to gather the people around him and utter among them once again the deciding cry, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Elijah troubled not himself with the priests; he had small hope for them; his mission was directed to the people; for in times of spiritual apostasy there is some possibility of recovering these for God, but of arresting or controlling their perfidious leaders there is none.

IV.—*The crowd summoned to watch while Deity decides who the true God is.*

The priests of Baal were to prepare their offering; Elijah would do likewise. On whose offering the fire from heaven should fall, the people's faith should turn. To "answer by fire" was not a hard thing for the true God to do, be he Baal or Jehovah; it would be easy for the one as the other; if either failed, yet one succeeded, he who sent down fire from heaven should be chosen and accepted as God. Such was the test. Unambiguous; demanding a miracle; yet a miracle certainly within the power of Deity.

"Baal" was the sun, the natural fount of fire; a name under which it was worshipped by the Chaldeans and Phœnicians; it was therefore most conciliatory towards these priests to ask a test by fire. If Baal was incompetent to respond, and yet Jehovah sent the living flame, would not that prove the single Deity of the Lord? The important principle affirmed by this challenge is—Judge of God by the proofs Himself gives of His Divinity. Even as Jesus appealed, "Believe Me for My very works' sake." Let us try the gods, and all creeds, by this test; and false deities

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will dwindle into helplessness and shrink into shame. But "marvellous are Thy works, O Lord, and that my soul knoweth right well."

V.—*The crowd all anxious because no answer is returned by Baal.*

The priests had every advantage: to them was given the first choice of a victim; and it was while the sun was at its full blaze their trial went on. If it be so that united prayer is more effectual than a solitary cry, the four hundred and fifty priests had greater hope of success. And if continued prayer is more effectual than one brief appeal, "from morning even until noon" they lifted their voice. And if impassioned, importunate invocation is more effectual than calm and placid prayer, "they cried aloud, O Baal, hear us; and leaped upon the altar, and cut themselves with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them." It is indeed strange that this god needed so much to move him to answer! How different from the God with whom we have to do.

Urgent had been the cry, full of pleading, from the agonized priests and from many among the crowds of people; but the sun is now in the meridian, and yet no sign or answer comes, and priests and people pause silent with a fearful dismay. Until they paused, Elijah stood quietly by watching; now he stepped forward and "mocked them;" not with frivolous bantering, amusing himself and the people at the priests' expense, but with the searching rebukes of sarcasm, exposing the falseness of their faith. "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." Goaded by this bitter irony and

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frantic with failure, seeing the test going so against them, they abandoned themselves to wildest and savage excesses.

Mid-day passed; the glowing sun poured down his fullest heat; Carmel in her beauty must have looked lovely and animated, standing so majestically there, dipping her foot in the blue sea; but the romance and glory of the scene were nothing to the eager crowd, nothing to the enraged and defeated priests. "Mid-day was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, yet there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." A heart sickening failure. Baal had disappointed them; failed them in extremity. So ever. O what if our trust be false and fail us in the great day of trial!

VI.—*The crowd invited to witness the vindication of Jehovah.*

Baffled, the priests retire. Elijah comes forward and calls the people near. They should see there was no deception. Eagerly would they watch that no secret fire was laid among the wood. He repaired the broken altar, arranging twelve stones in simple form, made a great trench around, put the wood in order, cut the bullock in pieces, and laid it on the wood. Thus far they were satisfied all was honestly done. Would Elijah also fail? Probably that was their belief. But what mad and suicidal order is this he gives, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood!" Marvelling at the meaning, it was yet done. Repeat it! They obeyed. "Do it the third time." And they did it, and "the water ran round about the altar, and filled the trench also with water." This drenching the wood rendered it a physical impossibility that by any natural process it could be lit.

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Why was all this? In heathen rites the people had been often befooled by concealed fire. This process would shew there was no illusion here. But for this convincing refutation, the priests might have imputed to Elijah some fraud. Then, if after all this the wood did ignite, the miracle would be more overpowering. Nor should it be ignored that Elijah had now made the terms of success harder for Jehovah than they were for Baal; for that water had introduced a serious difficulty they had not been troubled with. And now all was ready. A deathlike stillness fell on the scene. There alone before the altar stood the prophet; the priests exultant yet fearful; and the people all intent. Then, at the time of the evening sacrifice, "Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." [1 Kings xviii. 36—38.]

There was here no passionate invocation, no desperation; the prayer was calm, brief, confident. For well do we know that the trustful cry He ever heeds, and our God will not fail us.

VII.—*The crowd prostrate in adoration, acknowledging Jehovah to be the Lord.*

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is

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the God." The test left them incapable of doubt. Their attitude and their cry betokened

(1) Shame and contrition; that they had deserted the true God, had wronged Him, had withheld from Him the homage due, and given His glory to another. Being convinced of their sin, they mourned "with shame and confusion of face." More need have we, who by long disloyalty to God and rejection of Christ have committed the greater sin, to "abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes."

(2) Apprehension and alarm filled many a breast also; for might not that fire leap forth from the altar and consume them as erst it had destroyed Nadab and Abihu? And they bowed low in fear.

(3) Confession and gratitude followed; for the fire came not forth; they were spared. And as they knelt, hope returned to them, and they arose realizing God's mercy; and the mighty crowd with spontaneous cry shouted, "Jehovah, He is the God!" And that cry of a redeemed nation and a restored faith rolled in grandeur around Carmel, and heaven rejoiced to hear.

Conviction should lead to confession. Has the Lord proved Himself to you? Be not silent; lift up thy voice. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Cry aloud and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

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IV.

The Crowd on the Plain of Dura, worshipping the Royal Idol.

OVER the old world no king had vaster sway than Nebuchadnezzar. His reign is crowded with deeds of splendid renown. All modern researches among the ruins of Babylon bring up evidences of the unequalled greatness of this king's name and the magnificence which he created for himself by his extraordinary achievements and amazing conquests. He found Babylon an unimportant citadel; he made it the marvel of the age for grandeur, wealth, and beauty. "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" [Daniel iv. 30.] He ascended the throne when insurrection and weakness paralyzed his realm; he subdued nations by his prowess and made himself despot over once great, powerful, and inde-

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pendent peoples; so that he could issue an edict as "Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth." The Assyrian empire he subdued and possessed, vanquished the Egyptians, and became master of Syria, captured Jerusalem and carried thence the nobles of Israel captive into Babylon, and made himself feared throughout the inhabited world.

The Euphrates skirted the plain of Dura—a vast plain stretching out for perhaps fifty miles, convenient for the assembly of the greatest crowd of history. Overlooking the plain stood Babylon, called in the Book of God, as in distinction from all others, "that great city." Built four-square, and walled around, the wall on each of the four sides extended to the enormous length of over fourteen miles. The king had caused this wall to be erected, and it has been the wonder of all time. Herodotus tells us that this wall, of sixty miles stretch, towered to a height above the plain of 344 feet, and was 86 feet in thickness. But probably the height was not more than 86 feet and the breadth thirty. Yet think of a wall, even of this height, built in four continuous lines of over fourteen miles, having a double carriage way on it, with parapets running along the inner and outer edge of the wall, graced at intervals with lofty towers. The whole substance of the Isle of Wight might have been conveniently placed within those walls. Two miles within this outer enclosure was a second wall; ranging for ten miles on each of its four sides; and this opened with the "hundred gates," and within was the City of Babylon. A wondrous city; wherein stood the superb temple of Belus, and the magnificent palace of the monarch, which was one of the

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most prodigious and majestic products of power and wealth the world has ever seen. There too were "the hanging gardens" of artificial hills and valleys, contrived in order to gratify his Median queen, who languished for the natural undulations of the country she had left; together with other marvellous productions, all of which were creations of Nebuchadnezzar the king.

It entered into the heart of this grand despot to erect an image. With him to think was to act. And on the plain of Dura, which lay beneath the city, the image was set up. We have to do with the crowd which assembled at the dedication of that image, and worshipped it in obedience to the mighty king's decree. That such a crowd could be brought together for such an object calls for explanation, and suggests a state of things asking our regard. We are invited to ponder the fact that this crowd was summoned to prostrate themselves before a new idol; commanded to come for this purpose, compelled to do it when they came. Not merely to gaze at it as a fresh production of royal skill and wealth, nor alone to admire it and celebrate the inaugural ceremony of its uncovering; but to bow and prostrate themselves in homage before it, to pray to it, to bend their souls to a deity now for the first time called into existence, to accept a new god, and worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol of gold. Consider

I.—*How feeble a hold the idols had upon the people's hearts.*

It cost them no struggle, no pang of regret, to turn from their old deities to this new one. They came, they wondered, they worshipped. But what an idea of a God they must have had so easily to glide into accepting a new one. How

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lightly must they have esteemed and cherished their gods, thus readily to depose them for this stranger. A true worshipper casts his soul and trust on whom he worships, loves his God; until the God he trusts betrays his hopes. And surely if these people's gods had proved themselves powerful for their good they would not, they could not, so heartlessly and easily have neglected them to put their trust in and pay their homage to another. This incident, therefore, of nations and peoples being summoned to accept a new god, bespeaks the hollowness of idolatry, and exhibits how very slight is the attachment with which the worshipper clings to his idol. A love so unsteady, a faith so transferable, could neither be deep nor true.

It must surely be impossible for a human soul to attach itself, its hopes, confidence, and aspirations, to an idol! Man wants, yearns for, and must have a living and a personal God, whom he may love, and love supremely, alone; for the object of his worship is only his God as he is able thus wholly to centre his life's strongest and noblest yearnings in Him, and to trust his most solemn interests confidingly to Him. He who is doing this has found his God; and life could then be surrendered more easily than God could be abandoned. An idol cannot command and inspire such love and trust. Nor can any form of faith which places before the soul anything other than a living, personal God; be it Pantheism, or Deism, or Nature, or even a First-Cause. All these are too abstract, too impersonal. There is nothing for the heart to cling to, around whom affection may entwine, on whom the life may lean, in whom the soul may rest. And never is that want met till the soul bends before

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Jesus, and cries to Him, "My Lord and my God." Deity is sublime, but it does not win us; nor do all the perfections of Godhead. Between that and us there is an infinite gulf, and no mere necessity that we should have a god can bridge that gulf. If the heart is ever to be at rest it must rest in reaching the High and Holy God as He comes close in loving contact with man in Jesus.

Christ lays hold on our hearts. Once be He our Lord, and between us and Him the bond is final, inseperable, eternal. Can a Christian be allured to desert Him for a rival god, as were these vassals of the king? Bid us, "Lo, here, or lo, there!" shall we go after another lord? Answers not the believing soul, "Lord to whom shall we go but unto Thee?" "If I forget Thee, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I prefer not Thee above my chief joy." Contrast with this people's easy abandonment of their gods, the brave loyalty and changeless attachment of Christians to their Lord; think of the martyrs, "who loved not their lives to the death" rather than desert and deny Him; think of the noble two thousand clergy, the fathers of nonconformity, who "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods," and surrendered their livings, going forth into struggles and loss rather than bow their consciences to another king than Jesus. The secret of the difference is here; Christ lives in His people's love. Royal favour, worldly gain, social peace, and dear life, these we are very slow to sacrifice; but "Lovest thou Me more than these? yea, Lord, thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee!"

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II.—*How royalty held sway over the consciences and souls of the people.*

Or never would the king have summoned this crowd for such a purpose. He could dictate on matters of religion, and the people would be abject before his command, would bow prostrate before his image. Nebuchadnezzar knew it would be so and therefore issued the edict; he was conscious of having power over the very souls of men. Therefore he "made an image of gold, whose height was three-score cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon." [Daniel iii. 1.]

Reflect on what the king must have thought of himself that he could venture on this act of audacious impiety, and imperious outrage on the spiritual independence of the people. Great though Nebuchadnezzar was, had he power to make a god? Had this human being then so elevated himself as to be above what was divine? A creator is greater than the thing he creates. Was this man of unequalled vanity, this proud king, so inflated with conscious power as to think himself alone of all mere men equal to this work of creating a god? His inordinate self-esteem led him to this insolent assumption of supremacy even above deity! Ah! how had he forgotten the lesson which so recently he had learned, and his own testimony when Daniel explained to him his dream—"Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings." [Daniel ii. 47.]

His idea of the people was as contemptuous as that of himself was arrogant. They must worship whom or what he willed; were spiritual slaves whose souls as well as whose hands must do his bidding. Nor had he misread that

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multitude whom he called together. Whether they, unlike Moses, "feared the wrath of the king and were afraid of his commandment," and were obedient because they dreaded the threatened death by fire; or whether they worshipped the image because they were satisfied to worship as the king might choose; we know not: but their ready and absolute submission to his decree shows either that they dared not act for themselves, so bowed at the king's command; or that they did not think for themselves, so accepted the thing as right.

In the face of such an incident of vassalage, we rise fervently to protest, and proclaim man's spiritual independence! We deny and defy the right of secular power, however exalted, to rule the conscience. Loyal subjects in all things, till the presumption of rulers or kings infringes on the right of each living man and woman to absolute spiritual freedom; we will "render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, but to God alone the things which are God's."

It has been the fashion with kings, in their arrogance of power, to attempt to sway the consciences and spiritual life of their subjects. And to the shame of the peoples, it must be said, the masses have submitted; either, as with this crowd, because they dare not act, or did not think for themselves. Subjection to the king's religion is always easy and advantageous; but as nonconformists we have ever refused to bend our souls to the mandate of "the powers that be." Luther did. The Puritans did. The Scottish Covenanters did. And when the pompous edict went forth, they both dared to think for themselves, asking, whether the king's religion was God's? and deciding that it was not, they also

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dared to act out their convictions, refusing to bow. This is our attitude still. The royal religion, as established in the land, transgresses, as we believe, teachings of the Divinely given Word; and, because we know our right to absolute liberty in spiritual things, we have refused to conform; for it is better, it is "right to hearken to God rather than to man."

"Fear God, and honour the king;" but be not ensnared by the gorgeousness of royalty. Poor you may be and oppressed; yet are you on these accounts in no sense inferior to the king; the accidents of unequal earthly position are nothing with God; and the crowned head has no just power to dictate what shall be your creed or worship more than you have to control his. Be a man, therefore, however lowly, yield not your spiritual independence; nay, not for worldly advantage, nor fear of man, nor dread of death. Said the Roman emperor to Chrysostom, "I will banish thee." "Thou canst not," was his answer, "for the whole world is my Father's house." "Then will I kill thee." "That is not in thy power, for my life is hid with Christ in God." "I will deprive thee then of all thou possessest." "Nay, for my treasure is in heaven, and my riches are within me." "But I will exile thee, that thou shalt have not a friend or companion left." "Neither canst thou do that; for my Friend is He who will never leave me, and from whom none can sever me. I defy thee, proud emperor, thou canst do me no harm at all." True; for "neither principalities or powers are able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

These two facts, the feeble hold of idolatry on the people's hearts, and the royal supremacy over their consciences,

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explain the event of a crowd on the plain of Dura, assembled by the king's decree to pay homage to a new idol.

III.—*The royal image; what was it, and why erected?*

It was but natural that this last work of the king should be on a scale of equal wealth and splendour with all his former creations. So the image should be of gold, and of majestic proportions. It stood a hundred feet high, was ten feet broad, a solid, lofty thing, visible over all the vast plain. Scarcely, it is thought, could it be wholly of gold, but of wood plated with the precious metal. Yet his wealth was practically boundless; and after the dream which had presented before him an image whose "head was of gold," his ambition may have urged him to outdo it. Especially as that troublous dream had pourtrayed the overthrow of his great kingdom; so he would make a god so gorgeous and appalling that all the people should worship it, and thus submit their souls to his imperial sway.

The image was erected after his return from the conquest and spoliation of Egypt, where he had seen how their kings had raised to themselves colossal figures of stone, as in the existing fragment of Rameses, and in a spirit of insatiable rivalry he must set up a thing of vaster dimensions made in precious gold. The Egyptian monarchs reared images of themselves in order that they might be deified and worshipped by their people. It is not an extravagant fancy that Nebuchadnezzar may in like manner have sought to deify himself, and become a god over the nations now abject before his rule. Or possibly, he erected it simply in celebration of his wide victories, dedicating the image to Bel, the chief idol of the Chaldeans, or to Nebo, the patron

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god of Nebuchadnezzar's house. Let it, however, be considered that the king's empire now included many different nations, whom he had vanquished and now ruled; among these several peoples were various gods; why, since they were now united under one monarch, should they not all bow before one deity? And this despot seems to have resolved it should be so; therefore he fashioned his image of gold; summoned the princes, governors, and officers of all the provinces under his dominion, in order to enforce on the different nations, Egyptian, Assyrian, Jew, and Chaldean alike, the acceptance of this new idol. This would complete his conquest over them; would bend to his will not their outer life alone but their spiritual nature also; and, by compelling them to worship his god, he would become in reality a god himself, holding life and soul in absolute submission to his dictate.

Such a monstrous design could only be carried out by severest measures, by making refusal an offence which should forfeit life. "Whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." [Daniel iii. 6.] Here was the warrant of that iniquitous barbarity of burning heretics. It originated in Babylon. Only one earlier instance occurs, and that was also in Babylon. "The Lord make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire." [Jeremiah xxix. 22.] It is at least impressive to recall how Rome used this same hateful and hellish weapon of vengeance; and that too for the same godless purpose, namely, to subject the souls of men to her idolatry, burning as heretics those who refused to worship her image; thus

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emphatically identifying herself with the "Babylon" whose cruelties and sins the Apocalypse pourtrays, and against which the most solemn curses of heaven are pronounced.

IV.—*The crowd collected at the dedication of the image.*

"Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image." [Daniel iii. 3.] Only the chiefs seem to have been summoned; yet the people were there in vast numbers, of different nations and languages. "Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."

Summoned by royal edict, there was nothing voluntary in the people's homage. Compelled by the terror of the "furnace of fire," their obedience was not the cheerful worship of freedom and love. It was not, therefore, worship at all; for that alone is worship where heart and mind and soul freely bend in joyful homage and trustful prayer. "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." Christianity uses no force; but asks and wins our love; refusing all mere outward homage. It was written in old time, "This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men." God will not have it. No mere outward consent:

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"thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart." The All-seeing God sets no value on the religion which is perfunctory not spontaneous, formal not heartfelt. Yet even in this land where Christianity is our creed, and in the dominant church which a Christian state maintains, how shackled is the faith and compulsory is the worship! Spiritual liberty cannot breathe therein. Far healthier, more true to the Gospel is the life of those great voluntary churches which make their appeal alone to the people's free love.

A crowd gathering, all eager to bow before a new god! Ah, this love of novelty in spiritual things, how is it leading the people astray. A new theory, how it fascinates, even though it assails the very basis of the Gospel; a new ceremony, how it attracts, even though it covers the Crucified from the gaze of the soul. Popular religion is a very easy, unthinking thing, changing with convenient readiness to any new phase; even as it did before the image of the plain. Once England was loyal to the grand emancipation wrought by the throes and sufferings of the Reformation, and prized the untainted Protestantism which was our glory and strength; but now, how are the people bowing before a beguiling form of the old and odious Romanism which is being introduced among us both in teaching and ritual. O for the spirit of steadfastness and courage to return to our people, that they might confront this image-worship with a firm resistance and refusal; and cry—Not papal delusions, nor a king's religion, but Christianity unsullied; "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever!"

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V.—*The crowd arrested and astonished by the bravery of godliness, by instances of a true spiritual heroism.*

Three forms stood erect when the vast multitudes threw themselves prostrate. They would not obey the king's decree. Amid the adoring crowd they stood fearless, singular. Who are these? Young men, Hebrew captives, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried into Babylon, and who were installed there in court favour and honour. Till now, their religion had never necessitated their crossing the king's will. This was a crisis. The blast of music sounds over the plain; people from every vanquished nation instantly fall before the royal image, forsaking an old faith for this new one. But they cannot. Their God is high above all gods, and not as the idols. Moreover, they love the Lord; He holds their hearts; they cannot act disloyally to Him; they must defy the king's decree; and brave the result. And there they stood, erect, with unbending head or knee; scorning concealment; witnessing for God. The king's astonishment and anger were boundless. "Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do ye not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hand?" [Daniel iii. 13—15.]

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But how does their example rebuke all time-serving, vacillation, and cowardice. They were dauntless in the face of the king and of death. Not more so than they should have been. They knew that Jehovah was the true and only God; that His people were safe in His Almighty care. This impious king, challenging the power of God to deliver them out of his hand, who was he? And their more royal souls despised his vanity and his menance. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Thus to this crowd abject before the imperious king, did they present a splendid illustration of the bravery of true piety and of that "faith which ever overcomes;" rebuking inconstancy in religion and the spirit of craven fear; "leaving us an example that we should follow their steps."

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V.

The Crowd on the Hill of Blessing, listening to Jesus.

ROAMING through the highways of sacred history, and pausing on scenes which great assemblies of the people have rendered famous, we now quit the ancient paths and cross the border land of Scripture record into the more familiar scenes of New Testament narrative. And, as with all else in that holy book, our meditations on Bible crowds bring us to Jesus. Around Him the concourse had gathered as hearers of His word. Not scorning, as that crowd around Noah; nor idolatrous and debased, as beneath Sinai; not to choose a god had they met, as on Carmel; nor to do homage to a tyrant's image, as on the Dura plain; but to hear words from lips into which grace was poured "whereby they might be saved." "And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain, and when He was set His disciples came to Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them."

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That so early in our Lord's career such a crowd should have come together eager to listen to His words is remarkable. It was the consequence of His first circuit through Galilee, where He went "teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." [Matthew iv. 23.] He had come now to Capernaum, where "at even, when the sun did set," His deeds of healing grace were wrought with lavish freedom on the many sufferers who came around Him, until "all the city was gathered together at the door" of the house of Simon and Andrew, where He had gone for rest. At the turn of night, "rising up a great while before day," He left the city and departed into a solitary place for prayer; Simon and the disciples following afterwards, seeking Him. Very soon the city was again astir, and all excited and eager the people issued forth anxious to meet Jesus. Finding at length their Master, the disciples accosted Him with language expressive both of amazement and gratification, "All men seek for Thee!" [Mark i. 32—37.] For very extensively had the rumour of His teachings and miracles spread; "His fame went throughout all Syria;" and from all parts the people crowded together, "great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond Jordan," [Matt. iv. 24, 25.] anxious to see and hear this new Prophet who had arisen among them.

As to the scene whereon this greatest sermon of all time was preached there is diversity of thought. An eminence near Capernaum is selected by some, which bears the name, "The Hill of Blessing." The Church of Rome has a tra-

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dition that Tell Hattin was the site; but this is thought to be too remote. A considerable force of authority points opinion to Mount Tabor, and we readily accept the supposition as marking out a noble scene for this greatest Preacher in divinest speech to utter for the wide world through every age the truths of life. Tabor! Modern history has cast about this lovely and sacred mount a record strangely in contrast with this. Napoleon Buonaparte once stood there watching the terrific slaughter which his three thousand soldiers executed on the well-nigh thirty thousand raw, untrained men of the Turkish army there at the very base. If Tabor were the scene of this sermon, how different the sight which Jesus looked down upon—the hill sides covered with people thirsting for His words—from that scene of carnage on which the fierce eye of Napoleon rested!

The order of events in the New Testament narrative asks attention. It was after His circuit through Galilee. Jesus had spent part of the night on the mountain, having gone out a great while before day; "where He continued in prayer to God." [Luke vi. 12.] When it was day, descending the mountain He met His disciples coming after Him; and at once called out from among the larger number of His followers "twelve whom He named apostles." Continuing then His descent, there met Him the vast streams of people from the whole country around; whereupon He turned back to one of the mountain terraces (called by Luke "a plain," or level place), where, sitting on the higher mountain slope and the crowds reclining or standing on the lower table-land at His feet, He first called all His disciples

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near Him, and then began the sermon in the hearing of the whole people.

The tendency to place in contrast this proclamation of the Gospel of the New Testament on that mount, with the issuing of the law on Sinai, is irresistible.

(a) In the scene itself the contrast is striking; Sinai was rugged, repelling, desolate, while Tabor, or the Hill by the Sea, stands clothed with verdure, robed with charms. *(b)* In the manifestation of God given on Sinai, so full of awe, terribly appalling; and that revelation of "God manifested in the flesh" which here banished all dread, was full of grace," gentle, breathing love. *(c)* In the crowds assembled; that beneath Horeb trembling in terror, then abandoning itself to lawlessness; this, sitting peacefully before the Saviour, rapt in delighted hearing. *(d)* In the communications received by man; Sinai uttering its dread commands, and denouncements of human sin; Tabor sending forth its gracious teachings and shedding its beatitude on every form of human goodness. *(e)* In the Divine conduct towards the people; Jehovah forbidding them to come near Him on Sinai or to touch the mount whereon His glory rested; Jesus sitting down among the people, inviting them near while He spake. *(f)* In the effect produced upon the crowds; dismay and impatience, leading to rioting and idolatry beneath Sinai; calmness, joy, and admiration on the Hill of Blessing; "the people were astonished at His doctrine."

Not so great is the difference between the thunder which terrifies and the music which soothes; between the howling, wintry, tumultuous sea and the gently flowing, shaded stream.

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Sinai fills the heart with trembling; Tabor allures to joy and peace. As when we quit a scene of wreck and desolation, where ancient ruins frown down upon us, cold, grim, and bleak, and are swiftly carried into some fairest spot where nature has been lavish, where flowers, foliage, and songs of birds add every charm, so now in passing from the old era wherein our former crowds were found to the new age of human history in which this occurs, we are abruptly carried from the awful into the winning, from the grand into the beautiful, from the rugged majesty of antiquity into "the better things" of the Gospel which rejoice and refresh the soul. Through the old age the eyes and hopes of the people were directed forward, they stood eagerly looking on, yearning for Him whom prophecy had foretold, unto whom "the gathering of the people should be;" and though now that He had come Israel knew Him not, yet it rejoices us that an attentive crowd should early have gathered around the Saviour's feet, and we take our place with lowly gladness amid the concourse listening to Jesus; "for blessed are our eyes which see and our ears which hear."

I.—*The crowd sitting around Jesus: behold in that sight the happiest posture of humanity.*

Where find we that the crowds accustom themselves to sit? Is it around Jesus? Is it not rather before the idol of some low pleasure or passion? Is it not "in the seat of the scornful" and in scenes unholy and perilous to the soul? Do not the multitudes come together in force where Jesus is not? True, the ways of Zion mourn not over desertion, and the holy places are frequented by gathering numbers; yet what are they among so many? The popular preference is

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not for coming around Jesus. The people flow together drawn by the enticements of indulgence and the opportunities of earthly good. Humanity has not yet found her happiest place!

Look forth on the peoples of heathen lands, and lo, they gather in debasing idolatry, and in prostitution before the demons of superstition and carnality; on the continent, and there the multitudes take their submissive place before tyrannizing priests, or bend themselves down to the goddess of vanity: each nation sits before its own ideal good, its own habitual shrine; but how few are they who gather around Jesus! England professedly does this, yet what infidelity, scorn of religion, or semblance of Christian homage mark the people; how does the stream of the nation's life flow away into channels which travel far from Jesus and His Cross!

Is the world happy? Has humanity found the place of rest, the one scene wherein to realize true joy? O sorrowing, deceived, and disappointed world: O crushed, embittered, and deluded souls of men: O lives all weary with a fruitless search, "labouring for that which satisfieth not," and asking for the "any good" in vain: Here, and not elsewhere, here around Jesus alone are blissful rest and living joy to be found.

This crowd around Jesus, peaceful before Him, and appreciating His words, presents a sight which is full of prophecy; pourtraying, as the morning's early rays foretoken the mid-day splendours, the glorious age of Gospel diffusion when the multitudes with faith and joy shall surround the Saviour. Happy the age when deluded, saddened

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humanity shall be found at last "sitting at the feet of Jesus." There are those who have been there, and knowing it to be a blissful place, we lovingly invite and entreat all who are now strangers to happiness and rest to come there too. It is the most privileged place for souls on earth: for no delusion is there, nor grief, nor heart-sickening fear, but healing and hope, love and life. And it is the most privileged place for spirits in heaven: where the redeemed see His face, bow before Him with reverent joy, look with utmost rapture upon Him whom having not yet seen we love. O let us eagerly join the crowd who on earth take their place before Jesus the Lord, seeking in Him all good, resting on Him for life.

II.—*The crowd listening to Jesus: consider the benign occasion for which the concourse was assembled.*

The people were there in multitudes to hear the voice of the Incarnate God; to receive the words of truth and learn the way of salvation from Him who was "the Word of God." False teachers had beguiled and bewildered them; "they were as sheep not having a shepherd." They asked with anxiety for a "Teacher sent from God," a trustful guide, a spiritual friend. And the Word was made flesh, that men might hear among them the very voice of Deity, and receive direct from Holy lips the truth needed by their souls.

Awful indeed it is to hear the voice of God. Once already the people had crowded to hear it, and cried out beneath Sinai in alarm when it spake, entreating that the voice might speak to them no more. Once again will all peoples crowd together to hear that voice when at the judgment it will be heard, and then a deeper terror will

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strike the guilty and the falling rocks be sought as a hiding-place from its tones. But now *for the first time* could the people hear God's voice without dismay. Righteous or sinful, pharisee or publican, disciples or aliens, all were able calmly and restfully to listen while the voice of Jesus spoke of truth and laid bare human sin. Christ met the crowd with words of gentle warning, gracious counsel, convincing wisdom. For He was now here not to denounce or to judge, but to teach. The law which denounced had been already given; the hour when He would judge the world was in the far future; but midway between those occasions when the people had heard and would hear the voice of God in its awfulness, came this, when Jesus gathered them around Him speaking only words of instruction and blessing.

Yet men murmur at the Gospel, cavil at its teachings, would fain alter the things which came forth from the lips of Jesus! Thousands who murmur not nor cavil, "neglect the great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord," and will not hear. Let cavillers recall the law already heard by man, which left the soul dismayed and helpless to propitiate heaven; and then bethink them that though the Gospel of Jesus may humble human pride by its testimony against sin and of salvation alone through the Cross, yet it utters "glad tidings to the meek," and opens to every soul a redemption "worthy of all acceptation." And the heedless, who will not hearken to words spoken by Christ when in the flesh among us, would do well to anticipate that less gracious occasion when they must hear His voice, and now repent them of their hardness of heart lest then He call to them, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder,

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and perish." That gentle Speaker, uttering in such divine simplicity words of life and hope, has not yet ceased to make His voice to be heard; and we may even after so long a time listen as did this crowd on Tabor to words which shall be to the saving of our souls. We may hear the awful voice of God speaking graciously in Jesus; may hear that voice and yet live.

III.—*The crowd learning of Jesus: ponder the sublimest teaching communicated by God to men.*

Where shall we find instruction like to this? The law and prophets had imparted valuable knowledge to the world, casting many a ray of Divine light into the dark depths of the soul's ignorance; but Jesus opened wide the doors of knowledge, led His hearers into visions of heavenly wisdom, taught them precepts more wondrous, doctrines more exalted, truths more radiant, revealing to them the very mind of God, completing the revelation of His will to men. Standing among this listening crowd, correcting many an old error and teaching many a new truth, He announced that His words were not to overthrow ancient revelations from Jehovah, although His would surpass them. "I am come not to destroy the law or the prophets;" nay, but to make them the stepping-stones to loftier truths. He left all past communications far behind by the very act of guiding human thought and faith to larger views of righteousness and clearer perceptions of the hidden things of God. Ancient tradition also, as well as the law and prophets, claimed to have taught the world wisdom; but He whose teaching surpassed all former Divine revelations would surely excel "them of old time" and all their precepts.

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Indeed much which they had taught He overthrew as worthless and delusive; for tradition had been holding men to the poor "letter" of right and condoning the violation of its "spirit." Therefore He called His hearers to turn from the "wisdom of the wise" to the pure and perfect truths which God, who in times past had spoken by the prophets, was now proclaiming to the world through His Son.

Much which Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount not only contradicted tradition but also clashed with the prejudices and preferences of this crowd, even as they assail many of our modern fancies and cherished ideas; but, bewildering though it is to find our judgments and convictions overturned yet, if we are in the wrong and have made delusions our refuge, it is well we be corrected; for eternal interests are involved.

Have men, who refuse the truth as it is in Jesus, found elsewhere the teaching on spiritual and eternal themes which satisfies them? Why then their rush toward every new theory, their eager embrace of any novel teaching however crude and vague? Surely this shews discontent. To quit an old residence for a new home seems to imply dissatisfaction with it. To abandon an old acquaintance for another indicates that the one you desert was not all you wished. But there is something in the contented attitude of that crowd, in their eager, patient listening, in the utter absence of any remonstrance on their part, in their quiet acceptance of teaching which they understood was intended to confute their old creeds and incite them to desert their old leaders, something in all this denoting their discovery that "never man spake like this Man" and that they did

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well to hear Him. "And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."

His were words of *(a) Comfort.* "Blessed;" that was the first word. He opened His mouth with a blessing. O gentle Teacher, beginning not with reproach over guilt and wrong, but with a tender benediction! There was much against which He might have thundered out anathemas, making His hearers quail as His hot indignation against corruption, perfidy, and disobedience poured itself forth in vehement speech; but the thought of Jesus looked into human sadness, read all the wearying struggles in the hearts of men after righteousness and life, detected their hungerings and mournings, read the meaning of meekness of heart and lowliness of spirit, and therefore, spake comfortably to Jerusalem. "Blessed be ye poor; blessed ye that hunger; blessed ye that weep; blessed the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, peacemakers, the persecuted, and the reviled!" For Jesus has a gentle word for tired and sorrowing lives, can comfort all that mourn and give rest to labouring and laden souls. Words also of *(b) Counsel* were His, for men knew not the right, and with inarticulate longings were each crying "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And He answered that silent appeal and taught them knowledge and duty and godliness of life and the things which make for peace; shewing Himself pre-eminently "the Counsellor." He spoke also words of *(c) Correction*, thereby to rectify their errors and regulate their habits; pointing out the repulsiveness of pharisaism in alms-giving, fasting, and prayer, then instructing them how in secresy and simple

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speech to pray, how to live an undivided life toward God, how to dwell above the cares which weaken faith and burden the spirit, how to judge graciously of others, to look well to themselves and "enter in at the strait gate." Then spake He words of *(d) Warning;* against "false prophets" who came with flatteries only to destroy; against mere professional discipleship, "saying Lord, Lord," but withholding the surrender of heart and life to Him; and against the coming storm which would try the foundations of their hopes and cast down the expectation of the foolish who laid not wisely his trust on the Rock.

The world needed teaching; for men everywhere were in ignorance and perplexity. The Divine oracles had hitherto been restricted to Israel; but by breaking down the exclusiveness of Judaism and repudiating its traditions, Christ invited the whole world to His truth. What He taught was incapable of any national limitation. Tradition was for the Jews; the law and prophets were appropriated wholly by Israel; this sermon was for man, for all people. In choosing a crowd, and a crowd made up of multitudes from every surrounding country, including many a Gentile among the Jewish audience, our Lord testified that He sought no select class of hearers, nor addressed Himself to one nationality; His words were for widest diffusion and universal application. Philosophers surrounded themselves with an eclectic group, scorning "the herd," as they termed the people. But Jesus Christ, having a message and a mission to the world, gave forth His first great declaration of truth to "the multitudes." Rome bids her blinded millions leave the written Word of God in the hands of priests alone, tells the

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multitudes not to open, for they cannot understand, the Bible; warns her deluded children that the blessed Book which holds the words of Jesus is not for them. But this choice by our Lord of a large popular audience declares His will: *the crowds are to hear.* Ever during His ministry "the common people heard Him gladly." Nor did He once refuse them access when they sought to learn of Him. So, "seeing the multitudes," He recognized and seized the opportunity; they would hear though wise men after the flesh might scorn; and "opening His mouth He taught them."

IV.—*The crowd attentive to Jesus: remark the gracious charm He casts over those who heed His words.*

Very striking is the fact of their quiet fixed attention. They were held in the captivity of His speech. No voice of dissent rose out from the multitudes, no note of scorn, no word of dispute. He uttered what rebuked them, what destroyed their subterfuges, what put to blush both their accredited traditions and accepted pharisaism; yet did they feel that all He spake was true. In this lies the power of the Gospel. It convinces of sin, but instead of awakening hostility it subdues all resistance and bows conscience and heart beneath its teachings. Jesus shews us our wrong, destroys our cherished ideas, desolates all boasting and confidence, yet we cannot rebel. We listen, feeling He is right though His words pierce as a sword, and cannot but yield. O blessed the charm of His speech; mighty the sway of His teachings over the heart; who will not sit while Jesus makes His voice to be heard! This sermon was long, but there was no weariness, searching, but no resentment,

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direct, yet none found occasion of offence. Do not the people still prefer this same direct and faithful preaching? Souls gathering in the place of hearing, is it not so that they ask, not "a very lovely song," but truth? Are the multitudes fascinated by adroit theorisings, by novel speculations, by pulpit vagaries? How soon they tire, the appetite grows nauseated, and the eagerness droops! But give the people the Gospel; tell them the truths which lay bare the heart before Christ and bring Him clearly before the soul; tire they of this? Resent they the searching words of honest men of God? Grow they impatient when earnest fidelity marks the utterances addressed to their souls? Nay; the people come concerned for their spiritual good; truth is sought and not mere honied speech; and when they recognize the voice of Jesus they weary not nor resist.

Did the Lord perceive in that crowd all those varieties of character and condition to whom this sermon makes allusion? Surely among the multitudes were the poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, the persecuted, and the reviled. And no form of hopefulness and goodness escaped His loving eye. Alas there were also there, for what crowd is without them? those in anger, the obscene, oathbreakers, haters, pharisees in alms, fasting, and prayer, souls dividing servitude between God and mammon, some who take all thought for this life, not seeking first the kingdom. There too were they who had been asking and knocking with plaintive appeal at heaven's door, and those who were entering in at the strait gate; yes, and the ravening wolves who sought to devour

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the innocent, and mere professors also; and the builders wise and foolish, each eager for shelter against the flood.

Every aspect of life, every condition of feeling, every form of evil and of piety is here indicated or delineated. Jesus has a word for every one be his state whatever it may. That crowd was representative. In speaking to it and addressing its varied types of character, thought and feeling, Jesus spoke to humanity, to us. Those diversities are to be found in every concourse, gathered though it be, as this was, to hear the Lord. They are in our very sanctuaries. And seeing the multitudes He speaks to them. On whom is Jesus pronouncing "blessed are ye?" Who is He correcting, having lapsed into errors of life and religion? Who is He encouraging; saying "Ask, and it shall be given;" "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;" "Strive to enter in at the strait gate?" Who is He warning, as false and foolish? Fain would He have us all saved from the fallacies which detain the mind from His truth; seeking life in Him the One Friend of lost souls; building for eternity a sure resort which no storms shall overthrow.

Having heard His fervent words and been held by the power of His teachings, "the people were astonished." Only that? Did it all end there? Is it all to close so with you? "Astonished" at Jesus' words? Not impressed, not convinced, not heartbroken, not contrite, not importunate for grace to believe and live? Listening: is that all? He says "Learn of Me," drink My teaching into your very souls; learn! Thus open your hearts to the truths, and respond to His words of grace and love; for in so sitting at His feet, you will be made "wise unto salvation." "Be ye not hearers only, but doers of His word."

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VI.

The Crowd following with Hosannas, to Olivet which overlooked the city.

BEFORE applause is won there will have to be endured many a struggle, many a sorrow, many a weary lonely hour. This is true for all who ultimately ride upon the plaudits of the people. Not easy is the road which leads to popularity. The career which evokes such enthusiasm as that which now rose around Jesus will always be chequered, anxious, marked by antagonism mingled with scorn. He must needs go through rough incidents, through the "ranks of the aliens," who reaches such renown. For the good and lovely life which wins the people's praise always simultaneously arouses the fierceness and slanders of envious foes. Our Redeemer's career which at length brought Him to this incident of popular greeting had been full of opposition, defamation, and hate; yet lo, the people shout their

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hosannas around Him; for, strife and scorn notwithstanding, Jesus had won the people. And He is doing so still, though hostile forces are strong and envious antagonism is rife.

Often, as we have pondered His life, we have seen Jesus in sorrow and "despised:" we hail the more gladly therefore this incident of renown, momentary though it may have been. Our Saviour was worthy! The whole world should rise and greet Him thus; nor ever cease to adore and bless Him who comes to us in the Name of the Lord. Reverently will we who know His grace bow before our lowly King and hail with grateful songs His advent to our souls.

> Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,
> Thy welcome shall proclaim;
> And heaven's eternal arches ring
> With Thy beloved name.

Musing on the meaning of events in nature, we have watched how Spring-life comes: the gentle spirit would fain change dearth and death into loveliness and bounty; and she sets herself to the task. She breaks the barren earth, wakes the songs of birds, touches the trees with green; her benignant work begins with many a fair promise. But watch a moment, and lo, as if evil forces were roused into anger over her beautiful achievements, the North-wind rises and protests, and Storm lifts itself and rages, and Frost rushes over gardens and orchards with blackening, blighting touch; yet braving this hostility Spring goes on with her ministry, strives to remedy the havoc wrought on her fair exploits, till she triumphs over the menancing powers and finally clothes earth with the splendour of Summer.

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So was the course of Jesus. Gently He entered the world; men marvelled and were glad. It was never so seen in Israel. Wondrous and gracious were His works. But powers inimical—officialism, tradition, envy, spite—sought His defeat. Yet on His kingdom went, till the nation was aroused, till His fame brought Greeks from afar to "see Jesus," till the people gathered in adoration shouting their hosannas, and the whole city of Jerusalem was moved as He rode triumphant within.

Reflect on

I.—*The enthusiastic outburst of popularity.*

Like leaven working silently till the whole was moved, gradually had Jesus been gaining on the belief of the people, till now suddenly it revealed itself. There is some record of three hundred thousand people being in this applauding crowd; and the number is not excessive when we consider the multitudes at this season who had come up to the feast.

Think upon

(1) The popular excitement. It had a cause. This fervid state of the crowd is in some measure accounted for by the notable miracle Jesus had recently wrought in the locality in raising Lazarus from the grave. Lazarus was well known in the country around Bethany; the miracle had been talked of at Jerusalem among the multitudes assembled there at this time of the passover; great excitement and curiosity were in this way aroused; and altogether a very profound impression had been produced; so much so that "the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus." [John xii. 10, 11.] Hearing, there-

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fore, that our Lord had arrived at Bethany "much people of the Jews" left Jerusalem and went to the place where He was, eager to see both Him and Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. [verse 9.] And on the day following, large numbers of those who "had come to the feast" and should therefore have remained in the city, according to the good will of the priests, "when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem," went forth to meet Him. [verse 12.] And John adds, as thereby explaining their conduct, "for this cause the people also met Him, for that they heard that He had done this miracle." [verse 18.]

More wonderful than His miracle on Lazarus have been the workings of His grace upon our dead and outcast souls. Greater the deed to remove sin than to heal sickness; far more marvellous His act of saving from spiritual doom than from physical death; to lift up a soul from "the horrible pit" is surely more than to call back the body from the grave. If, therefore, the Olivet crowd were filled with homage to Christ because of His "mighty works," surely we "who were dead in sins," yet have been "quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" owe Him warmer praise and fuller adoration. Enthusiasm for Jesus! shall we be ashamed to shew it, or slow to glory in His name?

(2) The popular discipleship. "The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen." [Luke xix. 37.]

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Looking on that enthusiastic crowd we should think them all ardour and attachment. There seems to be true feeling in their homage, as they cry "Blessed is He!" Yet we have to doubt its sincerity and value. Where were these adoring multitudes only a few days later? Why did not they shout again their "hosannas" in the Prætorium? They might have rescued Jesus from priests and Pilate had they there lifted their voices against His condemnation. As now they followed Him with their praises there may have been in them conviction, a belief that this Jesus was the promised Messiah; as there is in thousands who would never expose themselves to any difficulty or hazard themselves in any danger for Him; but the discipleship which has no hold on the heart is a very poor, varying thing. This crowd had conviction but no attachment. For had they loved Jesus as well as believed in Him they must have overwhelmed the demands of His foes, "Crucify Him," with their more earnest acclamations, "Blessed is He," "Hosanna to the Lord."

The discipleship which shews itself merely in the hour of favour and success is a sham. Yet such is popular discipleship. Look at the descendants of this vociferous Olivet crowd; they throng our assemblies, go with the multitudes to keep holy-day, sing their hosannas, inspired as with a thrill of religious excitement; they enjoy the services of the sanctuary, for there is something exhilarating in the shouting and the palm branches, in the mere externals of Christianity; they have some appreciation of Jesus, they believe in Him, but their religion goes no deeper than conviction, there is nothing of personal attachment to Christ, no heart, no love.

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O ye who go with the crowd after Jesus, remember, that not they who follow Him for the hour because it is fashionable and pleasant are true disciples, "disciples whom He loves," but they who stand by Him in His shame and maltreatment, glorying even in His Cross.

(3) The popular homage. "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way." [Matt. xxi. 8.]

According to ancient custom this was the manner in which the people manifested their allegiance and loyalty. They spread garments and trees along the path of a conqueror, and carried the palm leaf before him as a symbol of peace. Thus did this crowd greet Jesus as a king. Their readiness to do this is easily accounted for: there was in the heart of Israel an impatient yearning for the Messiah to come; then too they had heard of the gentleness and gracious deeds of Jesus, and gladly would they have One so benignant for their king; for, crushed as they were by a cruel despotism, the rule of a monarch so mighty yet so gentle opened to them a prospect they were eager to embrace. Thus selfish even in their homage, we could expect from them no more than a superficial devotion, a greeting whose fervour would exhaust itself in garments, palm leaves, and shouting. Such loyalty involved no sacrifice or suffering. It would cost them nothing to let Jesus ride over their clothes, they did not leave them on the ground, while trees and leaves were cheaply obtained and could be left where they cast them without loss.

There can be a large amount of religious parade without a fraction of Christian feeling or self-denial. But we are

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not disciples of Jesus because we "make a fair show in the flesh" and are outwardly ostentatious of piety. In this age of a flimsy ritualistic Christianity it is thought very religious to decorate a church at festive seasons, to dress up "the altar" with candles and drapery, to exhibit excitement and "make ado." For ourselves we turn from such vanities, and rather look for signs of deep heart-discipleship on that weeping woman bathing Jesus' feet with her tears, on the poor widow giving all her living to the Lord, on the publican seeking a retired spot for penitential smitings upon his breast; for here we find no ostentatious show of homage, but soul veneration, heart love, humble faith. "Neither will I offer unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." The religion of this crowd was an evanescent, convenient thing. O that our discipleship may be enduring, founded on love.

II.—*The Saviour's acceptance of the peoples' acclaim.*

He was not displeased therewith. He appreciates and desires the homage of the people. Jesus did not stand away from the masses scorning their attention; He welcomed them to Him, valued their homage in so far as it was sincere. Though very humble and lowly you may be, Jesus will not despise your adorations, but will gladly heed them if you pour them forth from a heart of love.

Vainglorious leaders court popularity, crave applause, desire to be flattered and idolized: but there was no such self-seeking in Jesus. "He made Himself of no reputation." Heaven had yielded Him higher adorations than earth could ever present; "all the angels of God worship Him;" why should He seek popularity here? yet was He pleased with

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this homage of the crowd: so low, so lovingly does He bend. And the people's praises He still accepts and desires. A sinner's strain of adoration and love is very sweet to the ears of Jesus.

(1) Christ's assumption of royalty, is a fact here commanding attention. On a former occasion when the people were intent on making Him king, He went into retirement, refusing royalty; but now He assumed it. Ancient custom explains Christ's choice of this method of declaring Himself to be king: when a monarch went to war he rode a spirited charger, when he returned in peace he rode a mule or ass: Jesus therefore sat upon the colt and entered Jerusalem to express that He came as "King of Israel" and "Prince of peace." Though He was "meek and lowly of heart," what Nathaniel said of Him was true, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." Had He not been king this assumption of royalty would have been an act of vulgar arrogance and insolent usurpation. But His acceptance of all the honours of kingship gives in action His reply to the enquiry "Art Thou then a king?"

The event shews how easily Christ might have secured popular acclaim had He sought it; how clear the way was for Him to have set up a temporal monarchy, had His kingdom been of this world; what general support He would have received had He attempted to found Christianity by the exercise of royal force. He might have enjoyed national homage instead of being "despised among the people," gained the allegiance of multitudes to His cause and teachings instead of gathering merely a few poor obscure followers, been crowned with a diadem instead of with

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thorns, ascended a throne instead of the Cross. For He from whom men hid their faces so long as He continued among them in lowliness, became the hero of the hour, the object of enthusiasm so soon as He appropriated the signs of royalty.

Thus has He proved that He might have shunned abuse and founded an empire, yet that though through all His humiliation the sceptre was within His reach He refused earthly glory and chose Calvary as the goal to which He the Redeemer pressed and for which He rejected all else; "He humbled Himself to the death of the Cross."

(2) The fulfilment of prophecy is here evident. "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." [Matthew xxi. 4, 5.] The people were familiar with this prediction; they saw it now accomplished. Christ's sending for the colt shewed His intention to complete this prophecy to the letter. Now, unless He was the Messiah, what deliberate deception is here, what a cruel act of imposing on popular credulity does Jesus perform! But He thus declared openly, what He had secreted before, that He was the nation's Hope, Israel's King. "His hour had come;" and He manifested Himself. This was He that should come, they should not look for another.

The echoes of the "hosannas" with which the people greeted their King come around us. They have a voice of fervent appeal, urging every heart to hail Him. If their plaudits were empty and their homage superficial, we will

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not repeat their vain acclamations. Nay! for He whom prophets foretold as King asks and deserves the homage of love. What tribute are you prepared to render to the Royal Jesus? Though other lords have had dominion over you, Christ's alone is the "right to reign." Turn we all from fealty to usurpers, and yield to Him our life's best devotion, our heart's fond attachment, our faith's undivided trust.

"Hark the glad sound, the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long;
Let every heart prepare a throne,
And every voice a song."

III.—*The city viewed by Jesus from Olivet.*

"And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and to praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen." [Luke xix. 37.] Thus the crowds followed on with their applause until they all came to the brow of the hill which overlooked the city.

(1) The pause over the sight of Jerusalem. "And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it." [verse 41.] It must have been a solemn moment to the crowd. Conceive their shoutings hushed, as suddenly they observed the Saviour's countenance darken with grief, every one of that concourse awed and amazed at the sight of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. And then to have heard His words of terrible lamentation over the holy city, its cruel sins, and its hastening doom. They saw not what Jesus "beheld;" the accumulated crimes which lay already to her account, and all the tragic events of guilt and woe which ere many days should pass would transpire within the

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walls. It must have been a more solemn moment to Jesus; the sight of that city pained His gracious, pitying heart; and brought vividly before Him all those awful experiences awaiting the world's Saviour there. Ah! the shadow of the Cross lay darkly on His soul even while the joyous crowd exulted around Him. As He looked on Jerusalem He knew He was to enter, not to be made king as the people in their enthusiasm imagined, but to die. Hence Jesus was not elated by the hosannas, for His heart was burdened with the forebodings of that sore grief and shame to which He advanced. Yet because "He loved the people," loved us all with a "love stronger than death," He turned not back when He "beheld the city;" He "wept" yet went on to Jerusalem.

Olivet stands away a mile due east of Jerusalem. Gethsemane lay at the feet of our Lord, on the slope of the hill as He looked from its summit towards the city. Below Gethsemane ran the brook Kedron. The narrow valley of Jehoshaphat stretched beyond, in which stood the "Tombs of the Kings" Nehemiah and Absalom, and also of the Judges. Beyond was the Holy City. The atmosphere of Palestine is so clear that nothing dims the view. From the brow of Olivet to-day may be distinctly seen the wild flowers growing on the battlements of Jerusalem and the very dogs prowling within the streets. Visible therefore to the eye of Jesus as He then looked would be the Garden, sleeping so peacefully just below Him, where He would be betrayed; and there too the way over Kedron, and across the valley, and up the incline, into the city along which He so soon was to be led; and within Jerusalem was visible the very

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Prætorium where the cry "Crucify Him" would be raised, and the streets along which He would be hurried "without the gates," to Calvary the closing scene, where would end the woe of those dread days. Do you wonder that as "He beheld the city He wept over it?" O weeping, sorrowing Jesus, if for Thee to look on the scene of Thy grief and death thus troubled Thy soul and called forth tears, how should our hearts ache and mourn, since all Thy sorrow and shame were for us sinners and because of our sin!

(2) The advance into the city. The crowd resumed their hosannas, those going before and those following reiterating the acclaim; for the people could never know the grief within Him and Jesus would not check their joy because of His own sadness; He would see the multitudes happy though heavy sorrow was upon Himself. "And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?" [Matthew xxi. 10.]

Jesus never went far from the scene again. Once after this He came again to the summit of Olivet, and sat down with His disciples there, while He foretold how the temple should be destroyed and the city devastated. He sought no escape from Jerusalem, nor shunned the scene of those dark experiences which were lowering upon Him. He had come there to die, to meet the hour and power of darkness, and He was straitened till all was accomplished. The people who accompanied Him into the city with their hosannas saw Him daily in the temple during the interval; and for that brief space He lived in the fierce light of popularity, "the people were very attentive to hear Him;" [Luke xix. 48.] for which cause, with increased fury, "the

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chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him." [verse 47.] We will here pause, leaving the story of the closing days. Yet as we turn away from Olivet a sorrowful Voice seems to pursue us with the plaintive remonstrance, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!" O think you; if this crowd did Jesus homage, and adored Him as King before He was crucified, what should be our treatment of the Saviour now that He has suffered death for our souls! There is a more excellent way of shewing homage now, suited to the higher claims which fall upon us; it is this: yielding the throne of our love to Him, and hailing Him with the fervour of gratitude and the joy of faith, as disciples who share His grace and know His power to save. We ask for the Lord Jesus now, not loud "hosannas," but loving hearts.

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VII.

The Crowd before the Judgment Seat, demanding that Jesus be crucified.

THE cry of the people changing from "Hosanna!" to "Crucify Him!" is usually cited to illustrate the fickleness of popular enthusiasm. But the two crowds were composed of different persons; the whole multitude who hailed Him with their homage having been Christ's "disciples," [Luke xix. 37.] whereas this concourse was chiefly made up of the city rabble. The mournful fact to be noted is rather this, that those who believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the crowd who so recently led Him into Jerusalem with applause, should either have kept themselves distant from the Lord in the hour of His danger and shame, or else made no effort on behalf of Christ to outweigh the clamour of this mob by uplifting their voices in protest before Pilate. Had they done this, he would never have consented to His

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death; for he only yielded to the fury of the people's demand, fearing to defy their unanimous appeal. [Luke xxiii. 23.] It was their undivided outcry which "prevailed" to bring the sentence of crucifixion upon Jesus.

Gather the records into order: Christ entered Gethsemane about midnight; the Garden had witnessed His agony when Judas with his "band" came upon the mournful scene, and with the kiss, usual between friends who had been for a time parted, betrayed the Master "into the hands of sinners." O bitter the contrast; He had "dwelt in the bosom of the Father;" now He is betrayed into sinners' hands! They led Him *first to Annas*, father-in-law to Caiaphas the high priest, and by him He was questioned concerning "His disciples and His doctrine," [John xviii. 19.] doubtless with the intention to evoke from Jesus some statement on which to criminate Him; for an examination respecting "His disciples" might elicit some utterance which Annas might pervert as alluding to a secret confederation, and so lay Christ open to a political charge of an insurrectionary plot, and concerning "His doctrine" upon which he hoped to found an ecclesiastical charge against Jesus as being a teacher of "blasphemy." For they had already "consulted *how* they might put Him to death," and their anxiety was to find both a crime upon which the Sanhedrim might pronounce Him "guilty of death," and a political misdemeanor also for which they might demand from the Roman governor the sentence of death.

Firmly refusing Annas an answer, disdaining both the man and his motive, Jesus made His fearless appeal to His public life and teachings. "I spake openly in the world;

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I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? ask them that heard Me!" [John xviii. 20, 21.] Thus foiled and angry, Annas sent Him away "bound" *unto Caiaphas the high priest;* into whose palace the scribes and the elders had been hurriedly summoned, all of whom were eager to watch the issue of their murderous stratagem. To collect this Sanhedrim together in the dead of the night must have occupied some considerable time, so that to detain Christ with Annas for an informal questioning was an act of policy as well as craft. But "as soon as it was day" the council came together, and the high priest having Jesus brought before Him, the second examination began. Witnesses, who had been previously bribed to give criminal evidence against Him, were arraigned, but were utterly confused and frustrated; until at last two appeared whose witness had in it agreement and the semblance of truth, for they had lighted upon a saying of Christ, which, however, they so changed as wholly to falsify its application and meaning: "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." Let it be remembered that this was the worst charge that could be found against Jesus, and that by foes who had all the resources of hatred at their command: yet this did not give them a charge against Him sufficient for their end: they sought a crime for which He should die. That was their mature and inveterate aim; an aim first cherished on account of His healing and teaching, [John v. 16, 18.] which from that time strengthened into a deliberate plot, [John vii. 1.] becoming a well known purpose so that it

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was talked of among the people, [verses 25 and 26.] until the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection followed by the people's "hosannas" roused these ecclesiastical tyrants to the final and successful stratagem. [John xi. 47—53.]

Through all that mockery of a trial before Caiaphas Jesus stood silent. Provoked thereby, the high priest arose and upbraided Him, saying, "Answerest Thou nothing?" but Jesus held His peace. Then forgetting and dishonouring all jurisprudence, Caiaphas spoke again, "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us!" But it is an outrage and a wrong thus to put a prisoner upon his oath; yet what cared this high priest for justice if it stood between him and his aim? Thus solemnly adjured Jesus could maintain silence no longer without appearing to "deny Himself." Knowing, however, the malignant purpose which prompted this appeal, He saw that to answer it would be to give into their hands the fatal weapon they desired. But He could not hesitate now, though "even the death of the Cross" rose clearly before His vision as the sure consequence of His confession. Nevertheless His spirit did not quail; that death He had no desire to shun; while His followers' faith in Him through all time would depend on the testimony He should now bear. To deny the high priest's words would be to forswear His own Deity and Messiahship; to be silent would be to involve His disciples in endless mystery and doubt; to speak would be to surrender Himself to death, yet also to win His people's faith. "And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said unto him, Thou hast said:

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nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." [Matthew xxvi. 63, 64.] For there is a time to speak openly whatever may be the costs. Jesus met the time thus fearlessly, and before His plotting foes declared His Divine prerogatives; claimed the Messiahship, announced His Sonship with God, predicted His judgment of the world.

Consider that they condemned Christ to death for affirming these things of Himself. [Matthew xxvi. 66.] If they had wrongly interpreted His words, or understood them as claiming more of Divine glory than He intended, He would have corrected their mistake, for He knew their thoughts, and would not have accepted in silence their cry, "He hath spoken blasphemy: He is guilty of death." His acceptance of this consequence of His words testifies that they had read His language aright.

When this ecclesiastical trial had ended, the menials in the hall were allowed to indulge their malignity on Jesus, who being "bound" was in their power; and they blindfolded Him, mocked, smote, defiled, taunted, and insulted Him. Thus passed the hours between two and six o'clock in the early morning; by which time the crowd had gathered outside the palace of Caiaphas.

The *third* stage is now reached; and forthwith Jesus is borne along in haste *to Pilate, the Roman governor*. "And the whole multitude of them arose, and led Him unto Pilate." [Luke xxiii. 1.] This was imperative; for the Jews, being now subordinate to the Romans, had no power of themselves to inflict death, therefore must take their

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prisoner, whom they had condemned to die, to Pilate for His death-warrant. It was very early as they stood with noisy clamour before the governor's palace. The "Prætorium" was the official residence of the "prætor," where he resided and administered the law. Outside the Prætorium was an open, tessellated "pavement," which spread before the judgment seat. [John xix. 13.] Here the crowd assembled.

With a careless ease Pilate had often before this signed death-warrants, at the request of the powerful Jewish Sanhedrim, without himself hearing the case: not to have done so would have shewn open distrust of their judgment and proved a fruitful cause of turmoil. They naturally supposed he would have consented, without an enquiry, to Jesus' death. But instantly he saw their prisoner, and realized too the peculiar vehemence of the priests and excitement of the people, he appears to have felt the case to be of special import. Was there not a something in Jesus different from the ordinary culprits brought before him, which his practised eye could scarcely miss? He did not look like a hardened criminal, "worthy of death:" He was meek and lowly. He asked therefore "What accusation bring ye against this Man?" [John xviii. 29.] This surprised and annoyed them, and they returned the indignant answer, "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee." Which virtually refused Pilate an answer and said, We are quite capable of discerning guilt and deciding judgment, but "it is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" [verse 31.] we come to you simply for this Man's death-warrant; His sentence has been determined by us. Their

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answer added provocation to Pilate's curiosity, and, resenting their dictation, he demanded that the case should be tried before him.

It would have been useless had they now accused Christ of the ecclesiastical offence for which He had been by the council condemned; He must be convicted of a political crime before Pilate could legally pass sentence upon Him; therefore they make no mention of "blasphemy," on which they had pronounced Him guilty, but charge Him with "sedition." "They began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King." See the indictments: He was *(a) Seditious*, for "He stirred up the people." [verse 5.] *(b) Rebellious*, for He forbade tribute to the emperor. *(c) A usurper*, for He claimed to be King. It is certainly remarkable that these Jews, who groaned beneath the detested Roman rule, should have sought to criminate One of their own nation on these political charges. They had never manifested such zealous interest in the alien rule before. The last charge, that He claimed to be "king," forced itself most on Pilate's attention; it seemed so unlikely that this quiet and tender Man should be possessed with arrogance or ambition; he therefore enquired of Jesus concerning this in the inner hall, when He disclaimed all regard for earthly monarchy or the use of earthly weapons; "My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." [John xviii. 36.] Pilate therefore said to the chief priests and to the people, who

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had waited in impatience without, "I find no fault in this Man. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." [Luke xxiii. 4, 5.] The mention of Galilee gave Pilate a pretext for transferring the entire case to Herod, who exercised jurisdiction through that province. This subjected Jesus to a

Fourth trial; *before Herod, the Galilean king;* to whom He was led bound amid Roman soldiers, followed by a crowd full of offensive excitement. Herod was glad that this Man, who had aroused such intense interest through the country, should be brought before him; for he hoped to see some miracle wrought by Him, whose supernatural powers were so widely famed. But neither did Jesus work a miracle for his pleasure nor answer the licentious king a single word. Then "Herod with his men of war set at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back again to Pilate." [verse 11.]

The *fifth* trial finds the Redeemer standing *before the governor* again. In words of terse expostulation Pilate now addresses the chief priests, the rulers, and the multitude: "Ye have brought this Man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this Man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him; no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him." [verses 13—16.] At this moment Pilate's wife's message came in: "Have thou nothing to do with that just Man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."

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[Matthew xxvii. 19.] While the governor mused on this ominous message, which both perplexed and troubled him, the priests seized the interval for urging on the people what they should demand; "that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus." [verse 20.] Then "they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas." [Luke xxiii. 18.] Surprised by this astounding answer, Pilate put the case before them differently, "Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" [Mark xv. 9.] But the response was only the more emphatic, "Away with this Man, and release Barabbas." Bewildered by this determined clamour, he asked, "What shall I do then with Jesus?" [Matthew xxvii. 22.] Whereupon—O awful the incident—there rose up for the first time in all history that awful cry, swelling on the turbulent rage of the frenzied crowd, "CRUCIFY HIM!"

It was a significant cry; and it gave to Christendom and the world the sad yet saving Cross.

Even Pilate recoils with amazement at that word, and he hastens to remonstrate with the people; "Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him;" but they give, for they have, no reason for their demand; only "they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified." [Luke xxiii. 22, 23.] Seeing now that the popular vehemence could not be controlled, and fearing that by not yielding he might provoke "tumult" in the city—and he only naturally dreaded this, since Jerusalem was now thronged with people who had come to the feast—"he washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then

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answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." [Matthew xxvii. 24, 25.] "And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required." [Luke xxiii. 24.] Thereupon he surrendered Him to the soldiers for the cruel treatment usually preceding death; and they took Jesus into the common hall, stripped Him, robed Him in scarlet, crowned Him with thorns, put a reed in His right hand, bowed before and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and they spit upon Him, and smote Him on the head. [Matthew xxvii. 27—30.] After this, Pilate led Jesus forth, bearing upon Him all the signs of the savage treatment to which He had been subjected by the brutal soldiery; the blood gushing from His brow pierced with thorns and smitten with the reed, and clothed in the mocking scarlet. It might surely satisfy even that blood-thirsty crowd to look on that meek Sufferer so degraded and torn with anguish. "Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man!" Behold and pity; behold and forbear; beholding Him thus abused, restrain your malice and let Him go.

"O come, my soul, and gaze
On that great grief, that crown of thorn;
In deep and dread amaze
There look and mourn."

But to their frantic hatred there was no limit: the savage cry rose up more vehemently, "Crucify Him!" Utterly baffled, Pilate returned an answer expressive both of annoyance and despair, "Take ye Him, and crucify Him: for I find no fault in Him;" [John xix. 6.] whereupon, to justify themselves in demanding His death, "the Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law He ought to

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die, because He made Himself the Son of God." More deeply impressed now with the solemn mystery which surrounded Christ, Pilate took Him apart once again and asked Him "Whence art Thou?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Vexed by this silence Pilate said, "Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above." Upon hearing this, there again arose in Pilate a desire to release Jesus, but he was met with the warning cry, "If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend!" [John xix. 9—12.] Perceiving himself thus compromised and his very position endangered, "he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will." [Luke xxiii. 25.]

O wild and furious crowd, forgetful of your humanity, maddened against your Saviour, laying "wicked hands" upon the Holy Son of God, and clamouring for His blood; the heavens watch with anguish and dismay your deed, and weep over you: the earth also, awakened at length to the awfulness of your crime, stands shuddering as your fierce cry, "Crucify Him!" comes rolling on through the years.

Would that the "hosanna" crowd had been loyal in that dark hour, and rushed to the judgment hall, making their cry heard before Pilate, thus saving the blessed Jesus from the blind malice of that cruel mob! Yet let us not forget that "it was expedient for us that One Man should die for the people!" therefore was God's Only Son, the Sinner's Friend, "led forth to be crucified."

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Two facts ask here our special notice:

(1) The persevering silence of Jesus. While witnesses accused Him before Caiaphas, though it incensed the high priest to rise up in anger, Jesus held His peace and answered nothing. When the servants maltreated Him in the hall, and with taunts demanded "Prophesy who smote Thee;" He spake not a word. When Herod "questioned with Him in many words, He answered him nothing." Before Pilate He stood in silence while charges were being urged against Him, until the governor addressed Him "Hearest Thou how many things they witness against Thee? Yet He answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." And when Pilate took Him apart to ask Him why He had called Himself the Son of God, "Jesus gave him no answer."

What an example! "When He was reviled He reviled not again." What a fulfilment of prophetic utterance! "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." But there was a purpose in that persistent silence of Jesus; so even in that terrible hour He avoided what might have averted His atoning death. He could have controverted every charge and secured His release; but He would not. It would have prevented His condemnation, and the time had now come that He should die. Jesus was here that He might experience the death of one who was accursed. Think: He could have shunned it; but He deliberately preferred that the sentence should come upon Him. So true was His declaration, "I lay down My life of Myself." There would have been no value in His dying had it not been voluntary; but He "poured out His soul unto death."

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(2) The secret of priestly hate. "For envy they had delivered Him." [Matthew xxvii. 18.] His popularity and His power stirred them to frenzy. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" It was not that Jesus had done evil, or they would have borne witness of it: nor had He spoken evil that they should smite Him: there was no fault in Him. Yet look on the fierce and degrading treatment He received, and see the ferocity of ecclesiastical bigotry; then remember the religious persecutions of which history is so full; and watch the priestly tyranny which seeks to stamp out freedom even to-day, and maligns the good done by those who differ from them because they cannot stay their work. O ye who suffer aught for conviction and for conscience, "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

Turn attention now to the crowd; and we behold here

I.—*Popular cowardice to conviction.*

Though this was but a low mob, they must have seen that the trial and treatment of Jesus were unfair. The witnesses were contradictory, the charges puerile and false, yet the multitudes stood by and saw Christ insulted and abused. Surely they had heard and seen enough of His career to know that it was benign. The impossibility of finding a criminal charge against Him proves that this crowd knew Christ to be innocent. When Pilate said to them "I find no fault in Him," they had no charge to urge. Yet did they lend themselves to His condemnation! Alas, the human "heart is desperately wicked; who can know it?" Did never you see Christ illused and hear Him reviled,

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and yet act the coward to conviction? Was there never a moment when you felt yourself called to "stand up for Jesus," nevertheless you went with the many and played the timorous and ignoble part?

II.—*The crowd callous at the sight of Jesus' sufferings.*

Think on the cruelty they permitted Him to bear: taunted, buffeted, spit upon, and blindfolded in the hall; sent bound to Pilate and to Herod; arrayed and mocked by Herod's men of war; scourged by the whole band of soldiers in Pilate's house, crowned with thorns and smitten with the reed: a sight for pathos and pity, shame and tears. What! no heart touched; not one voice raised in protest? When Pilate said, "Behold the Man!" did none weep, or cry forbear?

It fills us with amaze that, although "before your eyes Jesus Christ is evidently set forth crucified among you," your hearts can remain stolid and feelingless. "Is it nothing to you? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow?" Does not such conduct resemble that of this heartless mob? Jesus has "shewed you His hands and His feet," stood patient and loving before you, pleading with your souls; but O you turn away, you have no tenderness in you. Behold the Man! He *was* despised; shall He be so still?

III.—*Their infuriated rage against Jesus.*

To have remained passive witnesses were sufficiently astounding, but that was not all: you are called to look on a crowd mad against the Saviour! Doing all in their power to destroy Christ! True, we see here the effects of priestly intolerance and bribery: for they "persuaded" the people,

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even as they bought Judas with their "thirty pieces of silver." Was it, then, gain which incited their fury? Do not the advantages of denying Christ make many to this day ready for acts of outrage on His followers? There are people who will scruple at nothing when the gain of ungodliness bribes them. This rough rabble had not realized Who Jesus was and how blessed His work; but the world and we know Him as the humbled Redeemer: greater therefore the sin if now with our eyes opened to the value of Christianity we indulge the sneer, mock at sacred things, dishonour Christ's name and abuse His love. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

IV.—*The people's frenzied cries.*

Some of the responses to Pilate were from the priests and officers; "We have a law that He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God:" "We have no king but Cæsar:" "If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend:" "Away with Him!" But

"Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas!" was the people's cry. [Luke xxiii. 18.] "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" [verse 21.] "His blood be on us, and on our children," [Matthew xxvii. 25.] were likewise theirs.

A robber and murderer was demanded by them rather than Jesus. Think you them insane? But has not the devil been a robber of human purity and peace, "a murderer also from the beginning?" Yet the crowds desire him rather than Jesus.

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The people's call for Christ to be crucified, though cruelty prompted it, was nevertheless one in which they knew not what they did; for they asked what made Jesus the Saviour of guilty men! "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "Without shedding of blood is no remission."

Awful and appalling this imprecation, "His blood be on us." It was the culminating crime of the nation. The terrible anger of God could withhold itself no longer; "wrath came on them to the uttermost." Victims of their own imprecation, visited with misery and calamity unparalleled, their after fate stands an historic warning to all who dare insult the Son of God. Judas "betrayed innocent blood:" and he "hanged himself" and "went to his own place." O tremble to bring on you "the blood of the Son of God." Blessed are they who have on them His blood—not of vengeance, but of redemption: not on their consciences, but "on their foreheads." For it shall seal their salvation sure.

V.—*The rush of the crowd to Calvary.*

"And there followed Him a great company of people:" [Luke xxiii. 27.] some eager to see the tragic end; some weeping bitter tears of grief, "which also bewailed and lamented Him." The heartless, and the weeper: to which class do you belong? Can it be that any remain unmoved before the grevious scene of the suffering Jesus? If you are strangers to bitter mourning and penitential tears, O be alarmed and pray! Some there are who have so learned to cherish the Lord Jesus as almost ready to cry "This shall not be unto Thee!" but we check our sorrow and amaze to remember that He endured the cruelty and anguish in order

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to become "perfect through sufferings;" and that it was His own will to suffer and to die.

O love Divine! can human hearts refuse to yield to its pathetic force? It demands life, soul, all! Come, Christian follower; come, awakened penitent; come and repay the cruelty done to Jesus by your adorations and hearts. "We love Him, because He first loved us."

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VIII.

The Crowd by the Cross on Calvary, watching the Saviour die.

"AND the people stood beholding. * * And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned." [Luke xxiii. 35, 48.]

We stand before a death scene. To watch a human life sink down and expire; what, in all experience, can be more solemn! Step into the death-chamber: hushed is every breath, awed every heart, tearful every eye, prayerful every soul. God and eternity are brought fearfully near us there. But O what a death scene is here! And He who is dying, "what manner of Man is this!" Verily around His death we should naturally expect all that is most solemn and sublime; and if any are permitted to watch the Saviour die, that they would stand with tearful awe beholding the darkness close upon the light of that Life Divine.

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Rough as life may be, buffeted even and disconsolate, we nevertheless look on hoping to die amid peaceful scenes, having around us then only those we love and who have loved us, being ministered to by gentle hands, and soothed by fondest words, the mournful hour of our departure made as happy as the incident of leaving dear fellowships and ties of earth can be by all that is tender in act and speech. The roughness of life surely will not follow us into death; the rude intrusion of unwelcome faces will not trouble the scene where we shall breathe our weary soul away.

There were many watchers by the dying Jesus; in throngs they came around. But does not retirement rather than such publicity more befit so solemn an incident? Certainly most ungenial to His meek spirit this dying in the open gaze of multitudes. For what can be conceived more repelling to a gentle soul than that unsympathetic crowds should press around while life languishes amid grief and suffering "even unto death!" Why then does this concourse gather around the Lord at such an hour? Are they there, as is indeed but natural when one is dying, mourning over their helplessness to avert death, longing with all the eagerness of love to hold Him back from the grasp of the Dark-Hand? Alas, no! for while some mourned bitterly as they gazed on the sad scene, He hung there because of human hate, the people having demanded that He should die. Nor are they there alleviating the pangs of dying; but rather adding to cruelest death pang on pang by their heartless taunts and scorn. Nor are they there cherishing with tender affection the Sufferer who is expiring in their gaze. Nay; they preferred Barabbas, and cried, "Away with this Man!". Nor

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did He die amid the quietude and comforts usual to death scenes, but distressed by tumult, saddened by irreverence, wounded by ribaldry, wasted with grief; and His dying bed was no other than the terrible Cross. O never thus died One so worthy human love: no death indeed had in it such misery and such pangs.

None ever knew such pain before,
Such infinite affliction;
None ever felt a grief like His
In that dread crucifixion.

Death is a momentous incident to man: it is something we look at with a trembling dismay; not so much because of the physical suffering associated with dying, not because of partings with life's sweetest endearments, not indeed because of those human and earthly surroundings which naturally make death painful, but rather because death hastens us from a world which is the only scene of preparation for meeting God into an eternity where we must confront the consequences of our human career, to a destiny of woe or bliss. But how did Jesus look at death? As the guilty, who would give a kingdom for one hour more of life, so as to delay entrance into the doom of the unsaved? As the uncertain, who have no clear hope of Divine love and heaven; and therefore linger in torturing doubt? As one grieving over unfinished duties and misspent hours, who can perhaps be "saved, yet so as by fire?" No! To Jesus death was welcome. He had come to this world for that event; knew it was the gate through which He would pass to blessedness and glory, that behind that gate, black though it was and grim, lay heaven. He alone of all who have

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ever lived had the satisfaction of reviewing life with a sense of having fully and perfectly accomplished every duty and mission for which He appeared on the earth; so died with the glad cry, "It is finished!" "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

The Cross was the goal of Christ's career; no mere impediment in His path, arresting Him, but the intentioned end, to which He directed all His thoughts through life. Just as men set before them as a goal, fortune, position, home, a happy old age, an honoured name; so Jesus lived for the Cross, travelled direct to Calvary. Unselfish in His purpose, seeking here nothing for Himself, but intent on human salvation even at the expense of His own precious blood, "the Son of man came to give His life!"

Calvary was not a lofty height; the scene lacked physical grandeur; its outline form resembled a skull; there was nothing majestic or inviting about it; a mere swell of ground, a mound rather than a mount. Sinai was incomparably more splendid; Tabor and Carmel and Hermon had each a natural nobleness wholly denied to Calvary: but O what heart does not find in Calvary a charm surpassing the "glory of Lebanon and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon?"

"Thou art heaven on earth to me,
Lovely, mournful Calvary."

Honoured and hallowed as the death scene of Jesus.

The Cross on which the Saviour died was not so large and massive as is generally represented; for the criminal, after the cruel scourging had already wasted both strength and nerve, was usually able to carry his cross alone. Jesus

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did this for some distance along the way, but His nature, exhausted by sorest grief and protracted suffering, failed Him. Generally the cross was only sufficiently longer than the human body to elevate the feet of the crucified slightly above reach of the ground. Crucifixion was not alone the most distressing mode of death but the most degrading, as hanging is with us; and only abandoned criminals, robbers, murderers, and slaves were thus executed.

Arrived at Golgotha, the soldiers stripped Jesus of His clothing, and offered Him the usual cup of wine whereby to deaden the senses to the awful pain of being transfixed to the Cross; but He refused it, for He must bear all without alleviation or stupefaction. The hands were then nailed to the crossbeam, the feet generally were nailed each apart, sometimes both together, an iron spike being driven through the flesh of both, fixing them to the upright post. It was at this moment of agony, before the Cross to which He was now secured had been lifted from the ground into its erect position, that there rose from the unmurmuring lips of Jesus the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" The crucifixion accomplished, the soldiers divided among themselves His clothes, casting lots for the unwoven outer robe; "and sitting down they watched Him there;" the crowd clustering behind, onlookers on that awful tragedy.

When we suffer from cruelty of others, it is some mitigation to hide our pain, or writhe under its torture only when out of their sight, thus denying those who have wronged us the gratification of seeing the misery they have caused; but Jesus, crucified by men, suffered before men; exposure,

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during all the frightful anguish, embittering the ordeal with many a poignant sting; He died in the gaze of the crowd. And as they watch the Saviour die let us draw near and mark

I.—*The crowd assembled around the Cross.*

It was sufficiently mixed and various. Divide the concourse: Gentiles were there as well as Jews; strangers who had come from afar to the feast, as well as resident citizens; the Roman centurion with his band of men entrusted with the superintendence of the crucifixion, and malignant priests and pharisees who had gathered around to watch; "women that followed Him from Galilee," and "daughters of Jerusalem" likewise; the companions of His boyhood, as well as the "acquaintance" of His early manhood; groups of that infuriated mob who clamoured for His death, and some of that crowd who had hailed Him with their adoring cries. Thus were present on the scene representatives of different nations, Romans, strangers, and Jews; and men who served in the different state offices, the military (soldiers), the ecclesiastic (priests and pharisees), and the legal (scribes of the law); persons also of different social grades, high and low, rich and poor; and, to complete the diversity, women as well as men. Humanity, of every nation, every distinction, every grade, was represented in that crowd; so that on no nation or social grade exclusively the charge of crucifying Jesus should fall, and that to none exclusively should flow the healing of the Cross.

Divide the crowd again according to their differing thoughts concerning Jesus as they watch Him die, and among that multitude are found the cruel hearted who

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delight in the spectacle of the Redeemer's anguish, mock Him with irony, and turn every cry of distress into scorn; others more tender who would fain alleviate His severe suffering by offering Him the stupifying wine, when they hear His fevered cry, "I thirst;" others who are mere wondering observers, having been interested and affected by the career of Jesus, but are now staggered that He should thus submit to die; others who are heartbroken weepers, who had learned to love Him as a Friend, and had "trusted it had been He who should redeem Israel;" while there were some who were spiritual worshippers, adoring Him with a reverent faith as the "Lamb of God," gazing with awe upon His great sacrifice for sin. Near the Cross also for a while stood His loving Mother, pierced to her soul with grief for her wondrous Son; and, by her side, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." There too on the one hand hung the reviling thief, crucified with Him and casting deriding words in His teeth, and on the other the prayerful penitent, whose spirit passed that day to be "with Him in Paradise." Strangely, mournfully varied that crowd.

Yet scarcely is there a congregation which throngs a Christian sanctuary but bears resemblance to this crowd by the Cross, differing almost equally as to their thoughts concerning Jesus. Happily not all cruel hearted, nor all scoffers; but some mere wonderers, who "stand afar off, beholding these things," never approaching the Crucified One in sympathy, faith, and prayer. Yet some there are weepers by the Cross, lamenting the sin which nailed Him to the tree; yea, and worshippers of the uplifted Christ also, crying at His feet "Our Lord, and our God!" O that our

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place before the Cross may be as penitents, believing in Jesus, loving the Divine Sufferer, clinging to Him with heart and soul.

II.—*The incidents witnessed by the crowd near the Cross.*

As they stood watching there it must have been to them a time of solemnity and excitement, of mingled passion and panic. The virulent derision that rose around the dying Lord from the "rulers," saying "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He be Christ, the chosen of God:" from the "soldiers," who mocking Him, said, "If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself:" from "passers by," who "railed on Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ah, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself, and come down from the Cross:" and also from the "malefactors," who cried, "If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us:" and all this "the people stood beholding."

The sudden and startling cries of Jesus from the Cross would also draw all eyes toward Himself, now visibly struggling with death; and as they gazed they saw the marks on His brow where the thorn-crown had been pressed and the bruises left by the scourgings He had endured; and, inasmuch as those cries were the outburst of intense soul anguish, His face must have been sorely "marred" by the conflict of pain and grief within Him; for there was a fearful meaning in those cries of Jesus, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!" "It is finished!" the "loud voice" but no words, and then "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!" And all this "the people stood beholding."

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The supernatural darkness which wrapped the sun from gaze and clothed the heavens and earth with miraculous and untimely gloom, must have awakened a mysterious awe in the crowd, especially when from amid that darkness broke forth the Sufferer's ominous cries. Then beneath their feet the earth did tremble, and around them rocks quaked and were rent, and sealed graves were thrown open, and the terrors of a dread convulsion of nature were on every hand; all this "the people stood beholding."

The rending of the temple vail followed, but this would not be witnessed by the crowd near the Cross.

Surely those watchers on Calvary ought to have recognized in these things a pourtraying of significant facts more important to note than the mere visible incidents; yet, even if they failed, we will reverently ponder them. And we may there behold

(1) The extent to which malice will lead the guilty.

Had Jesus been the worst of criminals and the basest of men, those rulers and priests, that reviling crowd, could scarcely have treated Him more grossly. There seemed no limit to their spiteful fury against Him. They carried their cruelty unspent to the last moment of His life. Alas! had it been so that Jesus was merely the worst of men they would not have troubled themselves against Him; they did not concerning Barabbas! But He was the Best; and therefore they detested Him; for His purity rebuked their lives, His teachings exposed their hypocrisy, His miracles refuted their calumnies, His unmurmuring submission roused their frenzy; and because "they hated Him without a cause," their hatred was the more fierce.

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We may be better than they; we denounce them as "Jerusalem sinners;" but were they sinners above all? Are there none as guilty as they? O let us "weep for ourselves;" for cruelty has been done to Jesus by our joining with sinners and in sin against Him! Mark also

(2) The sublimity of patience and goodness in the Sufferer.

Why submitted He to such indignities and anguish—He who stilled the storm, and raised the dead, and tamed the heart of him that had the "Legion?" Why that absolute withholding from Himself, and for His own interests, all exercise of His miraculous power? Why did He not silence the scorn, or convert His persecutors, or come down from the Cross? Why was not His ire unsheathed against the subtlety and virulence of men, instead of His bearing all without retort or murmur? Why did He pray for them, crying "Father, forgive them?" Why turned His heart so readily to the thief who became penitent, pledging him good instead of reproaching him for having reviled? Because He would become a Saviour; therefore did He bear all willingly, using no effort to avert or alleviate the ill; and opened His heart in boundless pity towards both His persecutors and the penitent. And behold there

(3) The scenic revelation of God's anger against sin.

Yes; it was the hour of Divine wrath against the unrighteousness of men, of Jehovah's punishment of our guilt. He was "smitten of God and afflicted." "But He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities." He suffered there our suffering, and bore the curse we could not bear. And in the fathomless anguish of

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Jesus men may see the infinite displeasure of Deity against sin. Have you thought what God's anger is, and what the unutterable misery of that life on which it descends? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Look on that awful death of Jesus, on whom human sin was visited; and conceive a soul suffering thus. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Yet also see

(4) The splendid unfolding of infinite love.

Intense was the anger in God's heart against the vile thing, sin; but O, boundless, exhaustless love for the soul. Therefore did the Saviour die that death. Come, read the Divine love even for "enemies." God so loved the world that He gave His Son to redeem it. Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. And there on Calvary it was made manifest. How could He more prove His infinite graciousness toward the guilty? "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, * * to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Here, therefore, we may behold

(5) The accomplished plan of human redemption.

"Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished," that He had suffered all which could ever be needful in order to take away the sin of the world, uttered the cry "It is finished." He had offered the "one sacrifice for sins for ever." Salvation for man was completed. Now He could quit the body, in which it was required that He should die, and leave for ever the humiliation and grief of His earthly life. Standing before that solemn Cross, the sinner penitent and believing may read the wondrous truth: "Redeemed with the precious blood of Christ." More cannot be asked.

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"Who is he that condemneth? Christ hath died!" His perfect atonement is our sufficient plea.

As we stand with the crowd before the Cross, and feel its mysterious and hallowed influence upon our souls, we may also discern

(6) The introduction among men of a new spiritual force, mighty to win their faith and love to Jesus.

"Lifted up; I will draw men." No incident had before occurred in human history whose avowed purpose was to allure hearts to God: but the death of Jesus, death by crucifixion, was declared to have that design, and should effect that result. Immediately the Saviour had died, this attractive energy began its work; from the Cross this spiritual power went forth winning souls and hearts for Jesus. The centurion, though he had come there commissioned to the cruel work of carrying out the execution of our Lord, was so moved by the scene and allured to the Sufferer as to yield first to the persuasion of the Cross; he "glorified God," and "feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." It then made itself felt upon the crowd which stood watching around: for "all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned." Working on with widening influence among the nation which had crucified the Saviour, it prepared the way for the pentecost, when three thousand were subdued to penitence through the preaching of the Cross. It has been attracting souls to Jesus from that hour; "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" on earth have been thereby won to His feet; while in heaven "a great multitude which no man

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can number" tell forth in grateful song the power which raised them to such bliss, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood!"

"I see, and I adore, in sympathy of love;
I feel the strong attractive power, to lift my soul above."

III.—*The feelings awakened in the crowd around the Cross.*

A group, composed of "his acquaintance, and the women that followed Him from Galilee," having taken up a position at some distance from where the Saviour hung, stood beholding, as if lost to understand the event. Apparently ashamed of Jesus in His degradation they keep "afar off," [Luke xxiii. 49.] afraid of identifying themselves with Him, although they had been friendly with Him for many years, having now no wish to be thought His disciples: and yet withal struggling between despair and desire, hoping against hope as they see Him suffer, fearing that the expectations they had placed in Him were visionary, marvelling that He who had wrought such deeds of power should now be exerting no might for Himself, yet dreaming to the very last that He would work some greater wonder than all. They shew it true that the Cross was "to the Jews a stumbling block." It was hard for them to believe in Christ with that in sight. But this was God's way of salvation; offensive though the Cross might be.

On the priests and rulers the crucifixion had a hardening effect; the patience and prayer of Jesus had not moved them to tenderness or contrition, nor the supernatural signs which surrounded His dying; because the hate within their hearts killed every other emotion. For on him who

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loves and pursues evil, the sight or hearing of Christ's sufferings can produce but a colder indifference and a baser stolidity.

In the centurion, and "they that were with him, watching Jesus," the sight awoke conviction; [Matthew xxvii. 54.] in the dying thief, it called forth penitence and prayer. [Luke xxiii. 42.] It filled the people with alarm, for they "smote their breasts," seeing in the marvellous tokens which occurred the expression of God's anger against them for having demanded Jesus' death; anguish also, for some would recall their imprecation before Pilate, "His blood be upon us;" remorse too stirred their consciences, for, alas, it was all too late now to undo the wrong; Jesus was dead. So "they returned." Once "crucify the Son of God," there is no amending and revoking the deed. The scorner, who makes others to fall, may himself repent, but cannot remedy the havoc he has wrought. Voltaire could deplore his ruinous influence on the souls of men, in that around Christianity he cast snares of derision and doubt, by which he has caused many to fall; but no remorse however dark and terrible can undo the work of his life and writings. A guilty deed, once committed, passes beyond the doer's control: he may weep over it eternally, but cannot wipe it out of history or arrest its influence on others. O pause, ere an act is done hostile to Jesus; your penitence can never rectify the cruelty. The people's alarm, anguish, and remorse could in no wise remedy their deed; Jesus was crucified.

So the crowd went away, leaving the dead Christ alone with the guard! The place is silent now; let us draw near

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and look. O mournful sight: and is that the Jesus we love? the Man so gentle and meek, the Lord so mighty to save? But let us not only "stand beholding;" rather smite our breasts in contrition for our sin, "look on Him whom they pierced and mourn," and bending humbly at His feet, repent, and embrace the Cross.

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IX.

The Jerusalem Crowd, stricken with remorse.

JESUS had been seen to die: the crucifixion was therefore a dreadful reality; no mere dream, no longer a menace simply; it was a fact: the guilty deed was done; and it lay to the Jewish nation's account. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth * * ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." [Acts ii. 22, 23.] Thus far official envy had triumphed: whether right or wrong the rulers and priests had brought to an early death this Young Man whose short career and ministry had so disturbed their own security among the people. He would trouble them no more.

But strange things came to their ears; that Jesus again lived! These tidings made them ill at ease. So that perhaps the end had not come. Indeed no: for it was true that the Crucified One had arisen, yea also and had

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"appeared unto many." To His disciples "He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days:" days so full of wonder, mystery, and delight; for He met them in converse, shewed them His hands and His feet, and they were glad when they saw the Lord. Then "He led them out as far as to Bethany;" where they received from Him the farewell commission to tell the facts of which they had been witnesses "to every creature," and watched their Lord and Saviour "taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

The ascension occurred on Thursday; in the evening of the day the disciples returned to Jerusalem, cherishing in their memories the parting promise of a supernatural baptism "not many days hence." That they realized this would be a wondrous boon is evident, since though they had seen the last of their Divine Master and Friend, they nevertheless "returned to Jerusalem with great joy," as if foreseeing the triumph of Jesus already begun. Arrived there, they entered "an upper room;" we know not whose it was, or where in the city; there they found some who were believers, among them "Mary the mother of Jesus," and there they joined together in prayer. O how strange to them the thought, that, while they prayed, there was now for the first time a "Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus," pleading for them in heaven! Verily as they realized that their loving and sympathetic Friend was now engaged on high on their behalf, they would see why He had bid them "rejoice, because He said, I go to the Father." He had carried their hearts within the vail and given them access to God.

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This was the first Christian prayer meeting. Let any, who think or speak disparagingly of meeting for prayer now, bethink them that these disciples, who "had the mind of Christ," came together immediately He was gone from them, and that their first act was to hold a prayer meeting: and then ponder the exhortation "not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is."

On the second Lord's Day after the ascension, very early in the morning "they were all with one accord in one place," met to renew their oft repeated prayer. Whose voice was at this moment rising in pleading supplication to God? Was it trembling Thomas, or fervid Peter, or loving John that now breathed forth the yearnings of that believing company for the promised Spirit? In a moment, interrupting the prayer, "while yet speaking," suddenly from heaven there fell a sound! Not a wind; but "a sound," like that made by a rushing wind. Wondrous sign: presenting nothing to the sight; making its appeal solely to the ear. For though the house was filled with a noise resembling the roar of a hurricane, all was motionless, unruffled, and calm. Surely this was that of which Jesus spake, "The Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof." Verily, as in Ezekiel's vision, so now "the Breath of the Lord" must be blowing upon them. Yes, like the signal which came to David that he should then rise to conquer the alien hosts, so again "there was a sound as of a going," denoting that they "should bestir" themselves. Awed and wondering, each head bowed reverently before this mysterious Presence. Then looking up, each to his astonishment saw resting on the head of the other a gleaming light,

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"a tongue of fire;" and they all arose in gladness to say, "Jesus, being at the right hand of God, hath shed forth this!"

Out poured that company from the upper room, all consciously gifted now with a new power of utterance, capable of adapting itself to the language of any, be his nation what it may: and, since Jerusalem was at this time filled with foreigners, they were met by Ethiopians and Copts, Egyptians and Asiatics, Romans and Hebrews. Immediately, finding themselves impelled, they found themselves also able to speak to them in every tongue and dialect concerning the crucified yet risen Jesus; and they did it with such a passion of eloquence that their hearers were startled alike by their speech and their theme. Then seizing the moment, Peter sprang forward, standing on some convenient elevation which could command a view of the thousands assembled; and, with adroit and pleading address, cast conviction upon the vast concourse, who were bowed and appalled by the direct appeals and burning energy of the speaker. Shame rose upon their faces, scorn died from many a lip, slander was silenced, the sigh was heard, the sob, the groan, the sharp cry of alarm and agony, "We have shed innocent blood!" and then there rose up from the terrified and penitent multitudes the bitter appeal, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" [verse 37.] And the Jerusalem crowd, which not many days since had exulted in Jesus' death, now openly bemoaned their deed and were stricken with remorse.

Here let us enquire into

I.—*The causes which brought this Jerusalem crowd together.*

How came it to pass that from "every nation under heaven" there were men at this time in Jerusalem?

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(1) They were drawn into the city by the sacred feasts. Fifty days after the passover came the pentecost: the passover memorialized the death of the first-born in Egypt; the pentecost followed, commemorating the giving of the law on Sinai and also celebrating the completion of the harvest. The devout Jews were attracted together from their settlements among varied nations to the observance of these holy feasts; they came for the passover, and large numbers remained during the intervening days until the pentecost. Doubtless also many tarried in the city for purposes of commerce; it being the great trading occasion of the year. The city was thus full of strangers. Some conception of the multitudes assembled there during these festivals may be gained from the fact that when Titus besieged Jerusalem, which was about the time of the passover, there were computed to have been no less than three millions of persons within the city. Josephus also, in his "Wars of the Jews," [book ii., chap. 3; § 1, 2.] has this record: "Now when that feast, which was observed after seven weeks, and which the Jews called pentecost, (*i.e.*, the 50th day) was at hand, its name being taken from the number of the days after the passover, the people got together, but not [as usual] on account of the accustomed divine worship, but of the indignation they had. Wherefore an immense multitude ran together, out of Galilee, and Idumea, and Jericho, and Perea that was beyond Jordan; but the people that naturally belonged to Judea itself were above the rest in numbers, etc. So they lay round about the Romans on every side and besieged them. Now Sabinus (the Roman general) was affrighted both at their multitude and at their

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courage, etc." From this historic allusion to the "immense" numbers gathered together, we can form some idea of the crowded state of Jerusalem at the time of the pentecost.

(2) But what drew this concourse together around the disciples? Doubtless the marvellous and miraculous "sound." Instead of reading "Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together," [verse 6.] let the words be rendered more literally, "but this sound having occurred;" and the allusion will be naturally, not to a rumour of what had happened drawing the crowd together, nor to the noise occasioned by many persons speaking in different tongues attracting them, but rather to the startling sound itself as the cause of the concourse rushing to the scene. It was so peculiar; not at all like an ordinary breeze, however strong, blowing along in the usual direction, but a mighty wind falling from heaven down upon the place, coming like the blast of the Lord from on high. The city was startled by the supernatural occurrence, and the multitudes came together confounded. Thus Peter's audience were all aroused and awakened by the miraculous descent, prepared thereby to attend to his word. Carefully let us pause to note now that

II.—*The crowd was gathered in Jerusalem.*

Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem!" In the very place where the Lord Jesus was degraded, maltreated, crucified, occurred this incident of wondrous grace. O deep was the stain of blood upon that city.

The occupancy of a throne was once in dispute, and the nation was divided. The rightful heir journeyed to the citadel; but as he passed on his way many a town sent

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forth its inhabitants to abuse him, who refused him succour, mocked at his claims, fought with his army, and plotted against the life of the heir himself. By and by he gained the throne; was crowned: and now, armed with revenge, he returned, wrecking the towns that had resisted him, and slaughtering the people who had maltreated him in the hour of his weakness: his accession to power was a signal for cruel recompense, and his path of retribution was marked by the blood of those who had slighted him.

Against this Jerusalem, who had "killed the prophets," and last of all had crucified its King, what sentence shall we write? "Woe to the bloody city!" Such would be man's righteous verdict. Let us watch the vengeance of Jesus, now that He is exalted to power. Will he smite, ravage, and burn with fire this city of iniquity? Will heaven shower down thunders of wrath, and all the alarming plagues of outraged justice rush to complete her utter ruin? Will the Lord deny all pity to Jerusalem and withhold all grace from the people? O wondrous vengeance of Jesus! Here is retaliation indeed: the revenge of all-subduing love. "Begin at Jerusalem!" Let My messengers tell to her people first of pardon through the blood they shed. Let My Spirit come with converting grace first on the very multitudes whose voices had filled those streets with execrations upon Me. And lo! so complete was the retribution of Jesus upon "these His enemies," that three thousand were vanquished on this pentecost morn, smitten low to contrition, filled with remorse at their deed, bowed in wonder, faith, and love before Him whom they had consented to slay! "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

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The triumphant exaltation of Jesus was signalized by His pouring forth His Spirit first on the crowd in Jerusalem.

III.—*It was a notable crowd, considered in itself, on which the Spirit fell.*

Including as it did, not only foreign Jews who had come up from their distant homes to the feasts, but traders also and visitors from Persia, Asia, Egypt, Africa, Asia-Minor, and Syria, it would give to the event of the Spirit's descent and to the words of Peter a widely extended influence; for the crowd would soon after disperse to their different countries, towns, and villages, carrying with them "the seed of the kingdom," which, planted in the varied soils, would germinate and fill the lands.

Yet more. This crowd would necessarily include very large numbers from those multitudes who witnessed Christ's condemnation and death. For these were "dwellers in Jerusalem;" [verse 5.] and whether this means that they were settled residents in the city or were making a temporary home there on account of the feasts, in either case they were there when Jesus died. On these very people now came the just charge of Peter, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." O this is a fearful bringing home of guilty deeds upon the doers! Their sin had surely found them out. "His blood was indeed upon them;" not in slaughtering vengeance, but on their conscience, on their

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souls; the sin of killing the Son of God forced itself upon their convictions. "Therefore let all the house of Israel, know assuredly"—for the fact was proved by the Spirit's miraculous descent—"that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." [verse 36.]

We have heard how a criminal, unable to flee from the memory of his deed of blood, has, though unsuspected by others, been driven to surrender himself to justice; how others, who would perhaps never have confessed their guilt, were yet ultimately met by their crimes which they sought to hide, overtaken by evidences which secured their arrest and conviction. Here was a meeting of sinners with their sin; and lo, their crime of guilt and blood was drawn out before them in fullest array and overwhelming conviction. And "when they heard, they were pricked to their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" [verse 37.] Never had there been a bringing home of such a sin upon men before. But O let us look on with solemn apprehensions to that great day of revealing when Jesus Himself will set all our secret sins in full disclosure before our face, unless repented of and purged by redeeming blood; and tremble lest then we be charged, on account of our rejection of His grace, with having abused the Son of God. The sinner will then meet his sin! Ere that day arrives, let us haste in penitence to the Fountain; wash and be clean.

IV.—*The crowd stirred to deep repentance.*

They did not at once reach this state of contrition. At first they were simply "confounded," [verse 6.] held in bewilderment, swayed by a sense of something mysterious

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having occurred. Presently they became "all amazed and were in doubt;" [verse 12.] feeling had deepened, the mind was arrested, the heart appalled. Some took refuge from conviction in ridicule, which was ridiculous, and in slander, which is so often the retort of men unwillingly convicted. But Peter's sermon followed, mighty through "demonstration of the Spirit;" and now those heartless multitudes were filled with compunction, those who had shouted out Christ's sentence now lift their cry of anguish "What shall we do?" the angry, furious mob which thronged the Prætorium and reviled at Calvary is transformed into a penitent crowd, three thousand of whom are converted, and brought, baptized and believing, into the Church!

We think of those Jerusalem sinners as of deepest stain; but the worst often yield soonest and become the best. Indeed there seems really more hope of those utterly bad being converted than of our exemplary people who are yet indifferent to their sins against Jesus. "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." We should have thought that Christ's grace would have gone last to that guilty city, and that they would have been the last to have lamented their sin; "but many that are last shall be first; and the first, last." Our Lord sees hope where we despair, and deserts as hopeless many whom we judge as "not far from the kingdom of heaven." Beholding how the first conquest of the ascended Jesus was wrought on this Jerusalem crowd, we now know that the Saviour's pity cannot be surpassed; for none have so illtreated Him but He will have mercy upon them in sending both His Spirit and His word to "prick them to the heart," and by saving

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them from their sin when in remorse they cry, "What shall we do?" And watching that three thousand gathered into Christ's Church we see that none are so stained with iniquity and crime but they may be made "white in the blood of the Lamb," and numbered among the redeemed of the Lord. It is the same Jesus, who is still "mighty to save," whose grace reaches down to the worst, those whose sins are as scarlet and red like crimson, "even unto the uttermost."

V.—*The secret of the success in those three thousand conversions.*

(1) Was it through the miraculous element now operating, in the sound and the tongues? If so, as we have now no such outward supernatural signs accompanying Christian preaching, we can reasonably expect no like consequences on modern work for Christ. If in the miraculous element we are to find the explanation of success, then we are helpless, for we have it not. But it was not so: for, notwithstanding both the sound and the tongues, some "mocked," and many were unmoved. These supernatural signs produced amazement, but miracles never convert. Conversion is a moral change, a spiritual event, not to be produced by wonder. Excitement, and a very high degree of excitement, may result from the appearance of what is extraordinary; but that cannot abide, and when the wonder has passed the effect ends. But the effect in this case was permanent; "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." There was a deeper influence on their hearts and souls than any amazement at what was miraculous could account for.

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(2) Was it in the freshness of feeling in the audience that the secret of this large success lay? There is much to be said for this view of the case, for really our modern sanctuary audiences, who are ever hearing but never converted by what they hear, get preached into dulness, sermonized to death; for their hearts become withered by the warmth of the preacher's theme, hardened by the force of his solemn appeals. Through constant hearing, "the lovely song" loses its charm. But though to this crowd the novel theme appealed to emotions which had not become deadened by familiarity, that fact was counterpoised by their destitution of all the advantages and helps which now prevail, for they were sorely ignorant of the Gospel, had a rooted unbelief in Jesus, were blinded and rendered hostile by their national prejudices against such a Messiah, and intensely unwilling to be convicted of the crime of having stained their nation with the blood of their King. Surely this was an audience scarcely prepared to receive the truth: the success cannot thus be explained.

(3) It was the convincing speech and sacred pathos of the preacher. No ambiguity dulled the force of his message; there was no cold philosophizing, soaring too high for the speaker himself to attain and becoming too ethereal for the hearers to grasp. His words were life-words; simple, apt, direct. His speech sprang from his heart, as the lightning from the bosom of the heavens, as the song from the rapturous angel hosts which told of Jesus born. Here is a type of a truly awakening sermon. Look at *(a)* The preacher. "Standing up, he lifted up his voice." [verse 14.] It was the attitude and action of a man inspired with earnest-

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ness. *(b)* The theme; dealing with personal sin, pourtraying it in utmost faithfulness, and then declaring the message of Jesus crucified, Jesus the Saviour. *(c)* The method. Having stated the facts, he charged the truth home, making each feel "Thou art the man!" and then pressed his appeals with growing persuasiveness and pathos. "With many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." [verse 40.]

Such was the preaching of Wesley and Whitfield: and indeed the men of great revivals have always preached as did Peter, clearly, convincingly, pathetically. True, in this case, the miraculous signs affected the concourse to attend favourably to what was spoken; but it was the sermon which brought them to penitence and faith. For the Word is the Spirit's sword. We have cause to believe in preaching, when it is addressed with fervour to consciences and hearts, when it testifies against sin and of Jesus. Yes, and we have reason to believe in prayer; for the Holy Spirit came while the disciples prayed, and therefore "the word was with power." O for a praying Church, beseeching heaven with fervent entreaty for the Gift Divine! And would that the ministry of this age were instinct with something more of the passion and earnestness of Peter, aiming more directly to convince of sin and subdue men's hearts to Christ! Ought any evangelical sermon fail to impress men deeply with their individual guiltiness concerning Jesus, and to impel them to importunate anxiety for salvation? Why have we not larger results: why do we not see pentecostal success? Because preaching is not sufficiently preceded by prayer, as it was by these first disciples; because the

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Church does not come together "with one accord in one place" to draw down by concentrated and persevering entreaty the Spirit of life; because the preacher is left so much alone in his solemn work, unsustained by Christian sympathy and supplications, whereas "Peter stood up with the eleven." O for the Holy Ghost! yes, and for a Church awakened to the value of prayer, crying while the preacher speaks, "Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live!"

VI.—*The crowd similarly and simultaneously stricken.*

We look for solitary conversions; but this instance shews that the same proclamation of the Gospel may at the same time affect very many in the same way. This crowd was a remarkably varied one, in nationality, in feelings toward the preacher, in attitude toward the truths they heard: yet all were swayed, impressed, "pricked in their heart," and three thousand were converted. There are similar feelings and thoughts, the same consciousness of sin and need of salvation in every human soul; the touch of nature which makes all kin is deeper than individual differences; and the truth which makes itself felt in one heart will be powerful with the many. Not a different Gospel is needed for the various types of character and condition among us; but the one theme for all cases and all nations.

What should hinder large numbers in a sanctuary assembly being converted at the same hour, through the same sermon? Have we not the apostolic message which spoke so mightily to this crowd; and the same Spirit which gave it demonstration and power? Ought there not to be conviction and compunction among the people now when they

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are charged with the sin of crucifying Jesus? Why are not like consequences witnessed—a crowd rising in anguish of soul, crying "What shall we do to be saved?" There is mournful reason to fear that the people have grown callous under the Divine word; but surely it is time to awake out of such a spiritual stupor. "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Whose heart is now yearning toward Jesus? Let him join this crowd in the pleading cry for grace. The dead proprieties of our modern Christian services would silence a quickened soul, compelling the most terrified conscience to hide its remorse: but these cried out. Yet, because of this damaging habit of secreting the soul's distress when the truth penetrates and alarms, we are unable to discern whether many are now similarly and simultaneously aroused to their need of mercy in Christ. Yet can we doubt for a moment that such awakenings do occur during faithful and powerful sermons? Where then is the Spirit who was given to the Church for ever? Or has He ceased to work as in the former years; or is His energy now enfeebled? Nay, He wields the word with equal effect to-day as at the pentecost; but it is so, that, when He has wrought mightily, these stricken ones delay to seek counsel till a quieter hour and secret place are gained, and meantime "the wicked one cometh, and catcheth away that which was sown in the heart;" feeling is allowed to subside, the eagerness to die. These thousands at once, careless of publicity, lifted their cry. The moment of conviction should be the moment for open enquiry and avowed desire to learn more of Christ. Delay will bring dissipation; the weakening of impressions, the loss of spiritual fervour.

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The affairs of your souls are all too serious for such easy inactivity to be indulged. To be awakened, so as to realize your spiritual peril and want, is a direct work of God's Spirit, a personal appeal made by Christ for your soul. Pay no heed, and the slighted Spirit may leave you, and the knocking be for ever silenced at the door of your heart. This crowd was indeed wise to seize the moment, regardless of propriety, and ask with impassioned voices, "What shall we do?" for it led to "the remission of their sins," their baptism into the faith of Christ, their welcome into the Saviour's Church.

VII.—*The crowd stricken with remorse.*

Can any state be more undesirable? It is an agonizing mood for a soul to be in. Here it included (1) Conviction of wrong; and that too of the worst kind, wrong done to Jesus. (2) Regret over cruelty; "that the same Jesus, whom God had made Lord and Christ, they had crucified;" on hearing which they were stung with anguish. [verse 37.] (3) Helplessness to retrieve the act. What, indeed, could they do? Could they "bring up Christ again from the dead?" (4) Dismay at their deed; for now they realized to the full their terrible deed in having shed the blood of the Divine Jesus.

Remorse, not unlike to this, has been felt by many awakened souls since, who have cried in anguish, "Woe is me, I am undone!" "O wretched man that I am!" for to see our sins in full disclosure, and realize our scorn and rejection of Christ, overwhelm the heart and conscience, until we feel ourselves to be "chief of sinners," hopeless, helpless, abandoned, lost.

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But remorse was not the end; nor ever should be. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Casting away their terror, "they gladly received his word," finding pardon through the atonement, trusting hopefully in Jesus, and openly accepting the rite which identified them with believers. "And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." The way into this grace is available still, "after so long a time;" and anxious spirits, though burdened with heaviest guilt, may find therein both cleansing for the conscience and perfect reconciliation with God.

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X.

A Crowd of Ephesian Zealots, raving about Diana.

TO such a man as Paul, Ephesus, as a scene of Christian work, presented strong attractions and claims. A timid disciple would have quitted the city content with a brief stay there. It was not the place for cowards and ease-lovers. A brave soul, a heroic heart must be in the Christian man who would face the dangers and attempt the conversion of Ephesus. But Paul set himself to the task; thus showing that the witness of Christ must be carried into the very strongholds of idolatry, and that a fearless avowal of Him is to be made by His followers though surrounded by many adversaries. Look at the city. Lying inland about five miles from the Ægean Sea, washed by the river Cayster, a river which was filled with ships from every foreign port, was Ephesus, situate upon the slope of a

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noble hill, known as Mount Prion. Celebrated even among the many famous cities of Ionia, itself the metropolis and capital of Asia-Minor, a vast emporium of trade, possessing its magnificent temple of Diana, resorted to by not only traders but worshippers also and sight-seers from all parts, Ephesus was a centre of amazing influence, offering splendid opportunities for witnessing of Christianity, giving to a vigilant man occasions for controversy with cavillers of every creed and philosophers of every school and visitors from every nation. It was a sphere just suited to the dauntless spirit, the ardent nature of the noble disciple of Gamaliel. To work for Christ is good and praiseworthy in itself wheresoever it be; but our Lord takes account of where that work is done, where the testimony for His Name is borne.

Paul had visited the city before, and then left a very deep impression in his own favour and in favour of the Gospel. "And he came to Ephesus, and left Priscilla and Aquila there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus." [Acts xviii. 19—21.] Fulfilling his promise he appeared on the scene again. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus." [xix. 1.] Instantly he addressed himself to his great work: first correcting the ignorance of the twelve disciples whom he found there, who knew only "John's

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baptism" and had "not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost;" [verses 2—7.] having been taught by Apollos, by whom "the way of God" was but imperfectly known: and then entering the synagogue, a Jewish synagogue of course, where Moses was read and Christ repudiated, he sought the conversion of his own countrymen. It was only natural that Jews were there in such numbers as to need a synagogue, for the city was a tempting scene for bartering and commerce. It was for no purpose of ingratiating himself with his kindred that he attended the place where the Jews worshipped; he did not preserve silence in their assembly as to his own faith, and appear still to hold to theirs, for the sake of first conciliating them to himself: Paul could not for an hour play the hypocrite; he scorned dissimulation and timidity; "the love of Christ constrained him;" therefore speak for his Lord he must. "And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly, * * disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." [verse 8.] It was a courageous thing to do, that carrying the Christian war into an enemy's citadel; telling of the Crucified in a synagogue of the Jews! Thus passed the first three months of his sojourn there.

It was, however, profitless toil; they became hardened against the truth and then defamed his work. But he obeyed his Lord's command in thus "beginning" with the Jews. He became now anxious to gather around him the inhabitants of the city and the visitors in order to preach the Gospel to them. So he engaged the school-room of "one Tyrannus," who was a philosopher and had a large school of disciples in Ephesus. As Tyrannus would need

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the room during the day for his own lectures on philosophy and rhetoric, and Paul had to work most of the day at tent-making, [Acts xx. 34.] the probability is that an arrangement was made for the room to be at Paul's service after the school hours were over. There is some reason to suppose that Tyrannus was a convert to Christianity. In that "school of one Tyrannus," quite an unconsecrated building, except as a holy use consecrated it, we recognize the first dissenting chapel, into which preacher and congregation withdrew for conscience sake, desiring both liberty and peace. Certainly, therefore, Dissent had no ignoble origin. It was forced upon Paul by intollerance and calumny.

Here came together every day concourses of people, excited, enquiring, disputing; for the strange yet sublime theme on which Paul continually spoke aroused public iuterest, while, with his cultured mind and fine persuasive eloquence, he was specially qualified to meet assailants. A skilful dialectician he must indeed have been who could confute Paul. Doubtless many who came to cavil, returned convinced; while others who entered that school from curiosity, retired converted. That many resorted thither is evident, for it is recorded that through these daily assemblies "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." [verse 10.] And that Paul's work and preaching were effective, is further evident, for it was the complaint of Demetrius that "not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people." [verse 26.] For his reputation spread, being carried back by visitors to their distant homes, until it became one of the attractions of the city

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to hear this Christian preacher; and so that "school of Tyrannus" grew to be a scene of daily excitement, strangers from every port as well as Ephesians themselves striving to gain entrance into the building that they might hear the discussions. So important was the work, and so important did Paul deem it, that he continued thus for over two years. [verse 10.] Writing from this city to the Church at Corinth, he says, "I will tarry at Ephesus until pentecost; for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." [1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.]

This success, so noteworthy in itself, and proving such a counter-attraction to the temple and worship of Diana, was preparing the agitation against Paul which soon after broke out. Then also there were those "special miracles," which produced such amazement and led to such wondrous consequences, which "God wrought by the hands of Paul." At this time Ephesus was the seat of the "black art;" charms and sorceries were in full acceptance in the city; enchantment was a profession and the sale of magic-spells a trade. With direct reference to this state of things, and to defeat the influence of these professional charmers over the people, God endowed Paul with a special power of like character to that which the sorcerers claimed, enabling him also to surpass their deeds; "so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." [verse 12.] Just as when the Egyptian magicians wrought marvels with their enchantments, the rod of Moses excelled all their deeds, eating up the serpents which the magicians produced, and leaving them thus confuted before

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the king. This peculiar and surpassing skill of Paul doubtless won the people from respect to the sorcerers, even as his preaching attracted them from the worship of Diana.

Then followed an incident of some significance. Hearing Paul use "the name of the Lord Jesus," and supposing it to be his talismanic word by which he wrought his wondrous incantations, some reckless adventurers "took upon them" to try the new charm which was so successful with the apostle. These were "vagabond Jews," (or "wandering Jews," the word "vagabond" here retaining the same sense as in the cognate word "vagary;") travelling "exorcists," who made it their trade to journey from place to place expelling evil spirits. There were, as in our Lord's day, Jews who professed this power; and it is to this He referred when He asked, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?" These Jewish "exorcists" used in their incantation certain mystic words ascribed to Soloman. Foiled now in the efficacy of their own charm they took up that of Paul: "calling over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." [verse 13.] This was done most freely and profanely by the seven sons of a certain superannuated "chief priest" of the name of "Sceva, a Jew;" but their audacity and blasphemy seem to have dismayed and appalled even "Beelzebub the prince of the devils." It was a Name of awful authority over the demons when used by Paul; but these arrogant men, who were they, that they should use the Name all Divine in insolent usurpation; not because they believed in or belonged to Jesus, but from envy and for gain? "And the evil spirit

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answered and said, Jesus I know, [acknowledge,] and Paul I know, [am acquainted with]; but who are ye?"—asked with indignation at their audacity and contempt of their pretensions. Then, incensed and frantic at their daring, "the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." [verse 16.]

The effect was marvellous. The inhabitants of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, were deeply impressed "and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." [verse 17.] Believers in Christ became more avowedly Christians, and abandoned everything which they had in their possession which savoured of the black art: "Many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds;" while also "Many of them which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men." [verses 18, 19.] These latter seem to have been converts to Christianity who had not until now thought it necessary to purge themselves utterly from these relics of their former belief and dealings in necromancy, or to give up their valuable parchments. Now they openly burnt them, and their worth is estimated at £1,700. This public act declared their absolute abandonment henceforth of all these dark and forbidden things, while their destruction of the books put wholly from them the temptation to return to their use. It was a complete response to the exhortations, "Touch not, handle not: put away evil from before thine eyes." Christianity was thereby greatly advanced. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." [verse 20.]

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All this had brought such a crisis that something must be done. The "craftsmen" were beginning to feel it. Now it happened "at this time," [verse 23.] that the yearly festival to Diana was held. We find the "chiefs of Asia" [verse 31.] were in Ephesus; and these Asiarchs were religious officers who presided over the public games held in honour of the deities. Their being now in Ephesus suggests that the season had come for the annual festivities and sports in delectation of the goddess Diana. Naturally these would bring into the city vast numbers of strangers; Ephesus was thronged. And these marvellous incidents occurring "at the same time" in connexion with Paul, the mass of people, instead of concentrating all their interest on Diana, were diverted from the city's idol by the excitement about this Christian apostle. The piety and zeal of "a certain man named Demetrius" were therefore fully roused; he grew angry over this division of public interest, more angry to find that the people now cared less to purchase those miniature models of the temple and goddess for which this city was famed. For Paul's teaching was leading very many to doubt idolatry altogether, and thus both to desert the temple and despise the "silver shrines" which beforetimes "brought no small gain unto the craftsmen." And this enthusiastic Demetrius was "a silversmith."

It was no slight thing for Christianity to have to contend with Jewish bigotry and the black art, as already it had done at Ephesus; but harder and fiercer far would be its struggles now that it came to war with "vested interests." A religion which pays well, a faith bolstered up with gold, a creed one of whose articles is that "gain is godliness," these

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are indeed difficult things to assail; for they are so very sacred and call forth such devout attachment. To think of disturbing the "established" religion, with all its fine "endowments," rich "livings," and paying crafts; why, it is sheer sacrilege! Surely they do well to be angry, who, imitating these "craftsmen," loudly protest against those intrepid and irreverent "schismatics" who repeat Paul's crime of imperilling the religion which the "state" sanctions and supports, and which brings "no small gain unto the craftsmen." Let the apostle beware, and those also who like him prefer Christ to all "time-honoured" delusions; for evil days are at hand.

So Demetrius summoned his fellow-workmen together in public assembly, and delivered an inflammatory speech; saying "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." Here was no disguise as to his ruling thought in wishing to maintain his creed. He rose in the meeting to defend his religion because "by this craft we have our wealth." It is a pity that equal ingenuous honesty does not betray itself in those among us who cling to the lucrative church.

Let us now turn aside to consider this temple and the goddess. The temple, of the Ionic style of art, was built at

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the expense of all the Greek cities of Asia. It was surrounded by one hundred and twenty marble columns, each sixty feet in height, every one the gift of a king. The roof was supported from the interior by green jasper columns. The whole temple structure was of purest marble, and stood at the head of the port, conspicuous to all, gleaming with splendour. Its dimensions were double those of St. Paul's Cathedral, which, though 500 feet long, is but 100 feet broad, whereas this was 425 feet by 220 feet. It occupied over two hundred years in building, and became accounted one of the seven wonders of the world. An altar erected by Praxiteles, one of the most distinguished sculptors of Greece, was added in the fourth century; and its interior walls were hung with paintings of the highest art by the Greek artist Apelles, whom Alexander the Great favoured and honoured, and Parrhasius, a native of Ephesus, a man of renowned genius. Altogether the temple was a thing of wonder and enthusiasm.

With this magnificent shrine for the setting, we should expect a most resplendent gem—a goddess of corresponding beauty; instead, the image was, says Kitto, "an ugly, old, black wood idol;" here called "Diana of the Ephesians," (Artemis,) in distinction from Diana of the Romans, of Grecian poetry and sculpture, "the huntress, chaste and fair." In shape like a mummy, having many breasts, with various animal forms carved upon it; it was the "impersonation of nature, the prolific mother of life." A crown of gold adorned its head, on which were engraven curious letters, which being copied upon parchments formed the charms. These "Ephesian letters" were widely

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celebrated and regarded as of great potency. Euthathius tells of an Ephesian and Milesian wrestling in the Olympic games, when the former prevailed. It was, however, discovered that he had worn during the contest the magic letters round his heel: the Milesian insisted on their being removed, then renewed the struggle, and this time easily overthrew his antagonist.

In defence of this temple and goddess these Ephesian craftsmen met. The harangue of Demetrius was effective: and fired with the enthusiasm of self-interest and love of gain, angry too at the prospect of losing their employ and wages, the whole company of workmen rushed out into the streets of the city, shouting "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." The whole place was at once "filled with confusion" by this wild conduct and tumultuous raving; a rough and reckless mob quickly assembled; away then swept the mass towards where they hoped to find Paul, but missing him they caught two of his companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and forthwith hurried them "with one accord into the theatre," the place of public concourse.

This theatre was the largest which the Greeks ever erected, capable of accommodating 50,000 persons. It was excavated from the sloping side of Mount Prion, and then faced with a portico. Its diameter was 660 feet. Here, crowding the immense edifice to its utmost, swarmed this rabid assembly, heated, angry, and ignorant.

Paul, hearing what had occurred, hastened towards the place and "would have entered in unto the people," but "the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him

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that he would not adventure himself into the theatre." [verses 30, 31.] Then followed a true mob-scene, of the most foolish and furious description. "Some cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together." At this juncture the Jews among the crowd became suddenly alarmed for their safety, for as Paul was of their nation they feared lest the mob should turn its fury upon all who were of the apostle's kindred; it was known also that the Jews were hostile to idols; moreover it might be remembered against them that for three months Paul had been allowed to use their synagogue. Dreading now the anger of the populace, "they drew Alexander out of the multitude," and put him forth as an apologist, to disown Paul and explain their own friendly relations towards—well, everyone, if only they might remain unmolested. "And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people; but when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Two hours; abandoned to noisy, deafening clamour; wisely and nobly spent indeed! It was the argument of fanaticism, frenzied intolerance, and foaming madness. So let systems of idolatry be defended, by the raving bigotry and overbearing fury of blind zealots: but it is a dishonour to Christianity that scenes and behaviour not dissimilar have been encouraged by boasted "defenders of our faith and our Church." England seems scarcely in advance of Ephesus; nor are we wanting in furious zealots as blind.

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The "townclerk," whose position was one of considerable influence in this city and commanded respect, appeared at this time in the theatre, and made a calm, adroit speech, quieting the people's apprehensions concerning Diana by skilful flattery, disarming their rage against the Christians by defending their character and testifying to their moderation, [verse 37.] and urging them to settle their charges in lawful assembly.

Zeal is praiseworthy. It may be ignorant and mis-directed, yet if these Ephesian zealots had a real faith in their goddess their enthusiasm would have been commendable. Their idol was imperilled; and they rose to her defence. Not wisely, but warmly; and for their warmth we have no blame. Does not their ardour rebuke us? If they were so zealous for an image, and devoted to idolatry because it "brought them gain," what should be our devotion, who worship not a hideous block of wood, but Jesus, the pure, the beautiful, the lovely, the loving, the Divine Jesus! from whom we also derive "no small gain," but riches untold, both in this life and in the world to come! Yet though around us continuous assaults are made upon His honour and on His Gospel, where are the earnest souls who rise in zealous defence? True, our consciousness of the safety and stability of our Divine religion may explain our equanimity in the midst of hostility towards our Lord and our faith, but that does not excuse our habitual silence before scoffers and practical unconcern before foes.

Zeal is praiseworthy, but fanaticism is hateful. It leads to cruel intolerance. It now endangered Paul's life, so that his friends were in alarm lest he should "adventure himself"

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among these zealots. Ask what fanaticism has done! It drove on the Inquisition, lit the Smithfield fires, filled Paris with blood on the day of Black Bartholomew, and has supplied the most sanguinary chapters ever penned in a nation's history. Fury in the name of religion? It is a mockery; it is blasphemous; it is rather the heart "set on fire of hell."

I.—As we ponder *the zeal of that fanatical crowd* we see,

(1) How naturally devoted men are to a religion which brings them worldly advantage. Contrast the sublimer example of the patriarchs who became "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," of the apostles who "left all and followed Jesus," and of the primitive Christians who "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods."

(2) How indignant men grow when their cherished idols are threatened. The moment Paul's preaching came to affect the "magnificence" of Diana, hatred rose up against Paul. Let men alone to enjoy their darling luxury, make no assault upon their "shrine" in which they take pride or from which they find some "gain" either of pleasure or advantage, and all goes agreeably on; but only lift a voice against the one foible or fancy in which their vanity or even their piety takes peculiar delight, and you have wounded their self-esteem; for you have impugned their judgment, insinuated that they can be in the wrong, or that the cause with which they have identified themselves may be a doomed cause: then their fury awakes. He, therefore, must expect to forfeit favour who attempts to demolish idols.

(3) How intolerant and jealous bigotry becomes towards successful Christian work. Wherefore was all this an-

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tagonism? "These men are neither robbers of churches, nor blasphemers of your goddess." [verse 37.] Ah, but they were gaining influence and "turning away" many from idolatry to serve the living God. Bigotry is ever ready with a panic, takes alarm at the spread of truth, and rushes to the task of stamping out spiritual freedom lest its own "temple" be forsaken and its "magnificence" be eclipsed. It is not that the good deserves to be evil spoken of, but that the natural heart loathes the truth and frets against its progress.

(4) How God's servants may become the victims of unjustifiable violence and popular rage. There was "no cause" [verse 40.] nor "a matter against any man" [verse 38.] to warrant this tumult and outcry; yet here were consecrated lives imperilled and noble characters calumniated. Let us beware of condemning because mere frenzy raves. They who have incurred malignity and "suffered persecution" for Christ's sake are not necessarily so bad as foes delight to describe them. The impartial "townclerk" was nearer the right than all this impassioned crowd. "The people imagine a vain thing."

II.—As we *listen to the cry of that crowd*, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," we cannot but bethink ourselves of our yet Greater Lord. Doubtless this thought would arise in the minds of Paul and his fellow-disciples.

(1) Was Diana "great" because of her imagined heavenly descent? "The image fell down from Jupiter;" at least so they believed. [verse 35.] But did not Jesus verily "come down from heaven?" Diana "fell," involuntarily, being a lifeless idol; but Jesus said "Lo! I come," and He

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came. It was His own act, and love all infinite impelled Him thereto; He "came into the world to save sinners."

(2) Great was Diana because of the magnificence of her temple? [verse 27.] But where is the house of the Redeemer's glory? The universe is the temple of Jesus. "Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him." The temple of Solomon in Jerusalem in splendour far surpassed this at Ephesus; but though He condescended there to "shine forth between the cherubim," it was not worthy Him whose majesty is Divine. The cleansed heart of the sinner is a nobler sanctuary far than the most resplendent earthly shrine; and therein, and there alone on earth, does He perpetually dwell.

(3) Great was Diana because of the numbers of her worshippers? "The city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana;" [verse 35.] "Whom all Asia and the world worshippeth;" was the boast of Demetrius. [verse 27.] But can she compare in this respect with Jesus? Why, "all the angels of God worship Him." "Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, out of every kindred and people and tongue and nation" own Him Lord of all. Earth and heaven join in His adoration. "And worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

(4) Great was Diana because of the potency of her charms?

"Jesus, the Name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrow cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears;
'Tis life and health and peace.

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Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find,
A sweeter sound than Thy blest Name,
O Saviour of mankind!"

(5) Great was Diana because of the gain she brought to the Ephesians? This was their chief concern; for their homage was sordid. Yet none can confer such benefits and blessings as we derive from Jesus. Inward wealth, more precious than gold, for "riches and honour are with Me; yea, durable riches and righteousness." [Proverbs viii. 18—21; 32 to end.] Nor wealth of joy and spiritual grace on earth alone; but eternal riches, imperishable "gain," "treasures in heaven," which nothing can corrupt and none can steal.

We join not the Ephesian cry; we cannot pause in adoration at Diana's shrine; our joyful homage we take to Jesus.

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XI.

The Universal Crowd, assembled for the Judgment.

HITHERTO our crowds have been historic; they lie in the far past; the most remote, that which gathered around the ark, being distant from us 4,220 years; the most recent, that in Ephesus, dates back 1,815 years. This crowd is prophetic. How distant or how near, who can tell? "Of that day or hour knoweth no man." "The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." Another stroke of the hour, and He may be here! The archangel's trump may awake us from our dreams this night; or the end may not be yet. "Watch therefore;" and "be ye ready also." "Prepare to meet thy God!"

Predicted though it is with inspired emphasis, pourtrayed though it is in God's Word with a minuteness of circumstance and detail beyond ordinary prophecies, yet around this foretold event have gathered the most violent assaults

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of infidelity, the most contending theories of speculation, the widest divergencies of faith. Consider

(1) How differently the predicted judgment is regarded and anticipated. Some answer the prophecy with scorn, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Others, with a criticism wholly subtle and evasive, attempt to explain it all away, declaring the words of Scripture to be fanciful not literal, and that the Judgment is only a figure of speech and will not be a fact. Of those who accept the prophecies literally there are yet many who wilfully shun the theme in order to "enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season;" others procrastinate in making ready because they "love the world and the things of the world" and dream that the day is afar; while with not a few the anticipation is cause of a secret heart-terror, for they know themselves unfit to meet the Judge who may be so near. Yet many are there who "look for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," "love His appearing," and joy in the contemplation of the event, saying with yearning eagerness, "Why is my Lord so long in coming?" "Come quickly, even so, come Lord Jesus."

(2) On what evidences does the expected judgment rest?

(a) Scripture predicts it; every New Testament writer penning a confirmation of the prophecy. *(b)* Life's anomalies demand it; for "these are but parts of God's ways," and Divine providences and the laws of right and justice are not, in this present order of things, either completed or vindicated. *(c)* Conscience forewarns the event; and is in itself a prophecy of a fuller judgment than at present prevails; for much which escapes its due condemnation now, and wrongs which though memory will not suffer to be lost

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in oblivion yet evade detection and recompense here, these conscience holds in custody and denounces resolutely, warning us with ceaseless monitions that "every secret thing" will be brought to light, and that judgment will eventually overtake the evil. Thus does conscience call for a full disclosure and predict it. *(d)* The almost universal idea of a coming "restitution of all things" is also a confirmation of the approaching "day of God" when the world shall stand before Him to be judged.

(3) What events in history are certainly to precede the day? The preaching of the Gospel to all nations, the conversion of the Jews, the millenial prosperity and peace of Christendom, and subsequently, for a season, an inrush of error and a declension from the truth; "for that day shall not come except there be a falling away first, and the man of sin be revealed." There are to be "wars and rumours of war," and a general disturbance of the nations, "men's hearts failing them for fear, and looking for things which shall come upon them;" and as the hour closes upon the world there will be "signs in the heavens above and the earth beneath," the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood, the stars of heaven falling; earthquakes in divers places, the seas and waves roaring, and all the powers of heaven shaken; by which is probably meant the most violent commotions among the nations, the most disastrous occurrences through the countries, and the most astonishing overthrows among the powers that be. During these general agitations and alarms, when the earth will be "as a fig tree shaken with an untimely wind," suddenly shall be heard the ringing cry of the archangel, the Judge will be here.

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(4) In what state will the world be when the judgment breaks in upon its career?

Ready to greet the Lord with joy? Nay; "All kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." A more pleasant hope has been indulged by many, that before Christ came mankind would have learned savingly to believe on Him: but this seems an error. "Knowledge shall be increased;" "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth;" "the Gospel must be preached to all nations;" but this does not affirm that all will accept what they hear or love what they know. Nay; "when the Son of man cometh will He find faith on the earth?" If then that day may according to prophecy come unawares, if it will come thus upon a world unprepared though not unforewarned, that great crowd on the Judgment Day opens a scene to us of surpassing sadness and mournful apprehension.

Though the time is unknown and unrevealed to us, it is not uncertain with God. "He hath appointed a day;" it is marked in the secret annals of eternity as "the day of God," "the day of the Lord," "that day," "the great day," "the last day," "the day of judgment," "the day of wrath." The second advent of Jesus is predicted as the solemn incident which shall usher in that universal judgment, when "before Him shall be gathered all nations," and "we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

The hand of prophecy lifts the vail of the future, and we look upon

I.—*Earth's vastest concourse.*

The realization of that crowd throws all other gatherings together of the people into unimportance.

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(1) In that one crowd all crowds of history will be absorbed.

All the crowds recorded in the Bible will be there, merged into this countless array; all the vast concourses of which history bears testimony will be there, swelling the great assembly. Who shall number the people? The earth bears at this hour some one thousand one hundred and ten millions of living souls; every twenty or perhaps thirty years the whole of that prodigious number die and are replaced by another 1,110,000,000. In a hundred years, if the population continues as it now is, there would live and die on this planet at least three thousand seven hundred millions of persons, possibly five thousand millions. Of course the population in this century is vastly greater than in any past; yet, should history go on, the numbers will increase with an appalling speed. This earth has been peopled for at least six thousand years; O who shall compute the mighty multitudes who have lived and departed! Where are they all? What a monster grave-yard earth is! O how deeply dug and crowded must be the sepulchres! An hour ago there were four thousand persons alive who are now dead; and as many or more have been born. Where are they all who have been born and who have died through the eight thousand seven hundred and sixty hours of one year; and through the six thousand years of human history? No figures can supply a conception of the universal array of life.

From whence will they come? The answer is, "All that are in the graves shall hear My voice, and shall come forth;" "the sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and

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death and hell shall deliver up the dead that are in them." Waking into life, "the dead in Christ shall rise first," glad to greet the resurrection morn and hail the day of redemption. The guilty dead shall also come forth, and not only "they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life." And this hear, ye who dream on in pleasant hope that all will arise on that day to be saved, or else that the wicked will be annihilated, never rising again from the dead; it is the Faithful Witness Himself who declares it, "they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." [John v. 29.] From the dim forgotten past shall the streams of awakened life pour into that crowd: every age and year of history will send its myriads to swell the prodigious train of the resuscitated dead; races of the human family now extinct coming back again on the scenes they once occupied, and tribes now lost presenting themselves once more to universal view. From farthest shores and lands, from inaccessible inlands and unexplored territories, shall assemble those "who are alive at the coming of the Lord." The dead of all ages, the living of all lands, shall be "gathered together from the four winds of the heavens and from the uttermost parts of the earth."

What shall call them together? "He shall send forth His angels and gather them." As "the armies of heaven" will attend the Judge at His appearing, it will be but an easy commission for them to fulfil; for starting at His word, those angel myriads, sweeping over continents and seas more swiftly than telegraphy could flash its message, (for "His ministers are a flame of fire,") would be in every town and village throughout the entire earth quick as thought. There

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loitering a moment on the wing amid the startled populace, the angel visitant would, with the trumpet call of God, summon the people together. O conceive the incident occurring in the very town you inhabit; your pleasures or employ or retirement disturbed by that shrill celestial note; hearing which you rise with trembling wonder, step from your home to learn the cause, when lo! on your amazed vision bursts the sight of this messenger of the Judge, around whom your townfolk are gathering terrified and weeping, to whom is now delivered the solemn command that all, that you, haste to the Divine tribunal, for the hour of judgment has come!

(2) Yet amid the countless living throng, not a soul will be hidden or lost to sight.

In an ordinary crowd many a solitary life is ignored and escapes attention. But there will be an individual presentation of each before the judgment seat of Christ. "For we must all appear" there. "Ye shall appear." "Every one of us shall give account of himself." "Thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Every soul will be called out distinct from the mass. So consciously will each one be there as seeming to be there alone. The intense singleness of every life, standing separate from all others, individually responsible to be individually judged; this will be so realized that the idea of a surrounding crowd will be overwhelmed by the appalling sense of being conspicuous, single, distinct. Each soul there will have a history hanging about it all its own, of suffering or joy, infamy or nobleness, sin or redemption. Personality will not be lost; for there could be no judgment without individual consciousness and

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memory. We must know who we are and what has been our history, or we cannot give account of ourselves, nor could any verdict be recognized as just. There will be no massing of multitudes together in a general examination or sentence, but each one, "according to that he hath done," whether he has been wise or foolish, diligent or wasteful of life, guilty or godly, will receive recompense. "Every man shall bear his own burden." "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." O let us not vainly dream of hiding away in the vast crowd! Nor need we dread lest, being lowly, we shall be overlooked. "I will both search My sheep and seek them out." "Not one of them shall be lost."

II.—*The final incidents of time.*

It seems right that for once all the human family should come together. They have never met before; they will never re-assemble again, for the judgment will eternally separate them. Ages have divided mankind; we are far distant from the years of Adam and Noah, Isaiah and Paul; but that one "day of the Lord" will bring men of all eras in history side by side. Seas and lands now divide the living; we dwell afar from Asia, China, and the Isles of the Seas; but all shall flow together to that universal crowd. "Out of every nation under heaven" shall its myriads be gathered. But wherefore shall they come?

(1) Why will the universal crowd be assembled?

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To watch the close of this epoch of probation; to witness also the Divine vindication of the laws of His government in the open recompense of goodness now outraged and evil now favoured; for the world needs to see "the due reward of sins" administered and the "righteous judgment" of virtue and piety awarded. But chiefly will that great crowd be assembled to meet the Judge and receive the solemn appointments of His righteous judgment.

(2) What occurrences will the gathered multitudes witness?

Waiting in apprehension and amaze, suddenly over them will resound the mighty trump of God; and O, how will the vast host simultaneously turn their uplifted gaze to the heavens! What an outspreading sea of eager faces! When, as suddenly as the trumpet call, they will see the firmament part as it were asunder, and downward will roll the brilliant clouds of glory, enfolding the Judge in their awful splendour, thus forming His "great white throne;" and crowding around, like denser but less brilliant clouds, will be visible the myriad angelic beings, stretching over the wide heavens an innumerable host, all luminous with celestial glory: for "the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints." And amid all behold the Judge; "pavilioned in splendour," seated for judgment; not robed with glittering insignia but vested in simplest guise. O Form of wondrous terror, yet withal so meek! O Face of awfulest yet utmost beauty! What Eye so sternly piercing yet infinitely tender! What Majesty so overwhelmingly sublime yet ineffably mild! With what appalling power possessed, yet moved with O what pity! Is it a thorn-wreath He wears upon His brow inwoven with the resplendent crown? Is it a Cross that

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shapes itself behind Him, wrought as it were into the Throne? Are those garments He wears, not merely the purple robes of Royalty, but dyed also with blood? And do there indeed mingle upon His Countenance shades of suffering and affliction softening the glow of joy? Who is this, invested with Omnipotence and "great glory," yet still so lowly and sad?

> "Can this be He, once wont to stray,
> A Pilgrim on the world's highway,
> Oppressed by power, and mocked by pride,
> The Nazarene,—The Crucified?"

"Behold He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."

> "It is my Maker—dare I stay?
> My Saviour—dare I turn away?"

(3) How will these incidents affect the crowd?

Our different relations to Jesus Christ will determine how His appearing will affect us. "The redeemed of the Lord" will be roused into ecstacy of joy that at length they behold Him "whom having not seen" they did yet love; crying as their glorious Friend descends, "Lo! this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." Blessed, eternally blessed they who meet Him with joy and not with grief! It is no vain thing to be able confidently to say, "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness."

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Dreadful with horror the reverse scene; of agonizing multitudes smiting their breasts in remorse and wringing their hands in alarm, uttering their terror-stricken cries, "Woe! woe! undone! lost!" or fleeing to hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, beseeching the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

Besides these two great divisions, there will be a vast number who never in this life heard of Jesus, who will awake from the sleep of death to look on the wondrous scene in ignorant amaze, asking in the language of the citizens of Jerusalem when He rode amid the people's hosannas, "Who is this?" to be answered, not as then, "This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, of Galilee," but this is "the great God, even the Saviour," who once visited earth incarnate that men might be saved through His death, but now hath appeared the second time to appoint mankind to their destiny. And in that hour, the heathen who knew not the Gospel, will realize their blind error and slavish idolatry, and wonder that none did tell them the glad tidings of the Cross. Yet for these, who, rising from their graves, for the first time hear of and see Jesus, there is a better hope than for all those who had the light, but neglected the great salvation. "Unto whom much is given, of him much will be required." "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin." "It is accepted according to that which a man hath and not according to what he hath not." "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known to turn away."

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(4) Think on the marvellous and miraculous disclosure which will then occur to all.

"We must all appear (be manifest) before the judgment seat;" "every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it." "The good works of some are manifest before; but they that are other cannot (then) be hid." "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." "Nothing is hid which shall not be manifested." We do all live so disguised from the inspection of the world, intentionally secreting ourselves from the enquiry of others, putting on appearances which mask our real selves, that "surely every man walketh in a vain shew." And as we enclose ourselves in habits of dissimulation, so others elude our knowledge of them: thus are we continually misunderstood and find ourselves deceived. But "then shall we know even as we are known." All shall stand in the true light; and "the secrets of all hearts be made manifest in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." Nor is there alone this guileless veiling of ourselves one from the other; but a calamitous "deceiving our own selves;" a practising deceit on our consciences and hearts for the sake of a quiet enjoyment of ill; until we become deluded, our minds blinded, and darkness happens unto us. But what we are, and have been, and have done, through the years of life on earth, the motives and qualities of all our actions, the consequences also on others of our career, will stand revealed to ourselves, clear to the world. It is prophesied as "the day of revelation." And hypocrisy will then be unveiled, insincerity detected, hidden goodness brought to light,

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trampled work vindicated, Christian lowliness uplifted, the despised things raised to honour, and the exalted abased. O what a spectacle to the world and to angels, that disrobing of the vast crowd and laying bare all hearts! For all things, now "open and naked unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do," will then be manifested to the gaze of humanity; and then it will be evident that "the Judge of all the earth doeth right."

III.—*The judgment of the world.*

Universal will be the crowd gathered; "quick and dead," from far off scenes and times; all to the great assize.

(1) How will the judgment be conducted?

Scripture affirms that each will stand before Christ, render his account and receive his sentence. True, there are seeming impossibilities in the way of such a proceeding. Yet to the objection that it would require an eternity thus to arraign each before the Divine tribunal, we give answer that God's plans and proceedings are not fettered by difficulties such as limit ours. Who will be so mad as to nurse this thought of the impossibility of an individual judgment, and go on to that dread day unsaved, then to adventure himself upon the conceit that the judgment will not find and single him out? Rather, leaving all criticism and speculation, let us be ready to answer to the Divine call, and appear at His bar.

The test of righteousness will not be in each case the same. The heathen "being without law, will be judged without law," but by the law of conscience and of fidelity to their sense of right. The Jews who "sinned in the law, will be judged by the law." While they who lived under

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Christianity will be tried by that higher and severer standard; and "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for them."

The "books will be opened," wherein are recorded all the incidents of human careers; those "books" being the Memory of God and the awakened consciousness and consciences of men. All our life will be then before our Judge, and all will be flashed upon our thought in a moment as we stand before Him; and we "shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books." Then shall be opened "another book, which is the book of life;" that Book is the Heart of Jesus, whose faithful love preserves the names of all His ransomed ones. It is called "the Lamb's book of life." O that our names may be therein!

(2) How will the judgment terminate?

There will be division; the classification of characters, the arranging like with like; setting the redeemed on the right hand, the rest on the left of the Judge. Then shall He "separate the one from the other, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." O that dread severing of groups who, allied by earthly and human ties now, will then cling one to another in terror and anguish; mother from child, friend from friend, people from pastor, heart from heart! All other bonds of life, however tender and enduring they may have been, snapt asunder; and the spiritual bond alone allowed to determine our companionship when we "stand in our lot at the end of the days." "Gather not my soul with sinners!" "Make me to be numbered with Thy saints!" Rank yourself now with Christ's loved ones! O who to-day will place himself "on the Lord's side!" Who

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will take up the language of Christian decision and say, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!" For our relation to Jesus will determine our place in the day of division.

Then follows destiny. The angels will "bind them in bundles" who are to be burned, but will "gather the wheat into the barn." "Then shall the King say to those on the left hand, Depart! and to those on the right hand, Come!" And the great companies shall turn each to their appointed future. Ask you, Whither will that crowd disperse? "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

O where in that crowd shall we be found? Whither shall we go when the universal concourse finally divides? Ask it, "What am I, whither am I going?"

> "When Thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come,
> To fetch Thy ransomed people home,
> Shall I among them stand?"

To be excluded from the ranks of "the blessed;" not to be "caught up in the clouds, and so to be for ever with the Lord;" to be left here while the exultant train of the holy pass "through the gates into the city;" will this be our dread lot? But the fiery deluge will engulph the outcast and guilty! "Earth and all therein will be burned up." O dire and appalling such a destiny! "Escape for thy life: tarry not, lest thou be consumed!" The Lord grant that we may find mercy in that day!

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NOTE.—Allusions to the Judgment are found in every book and epistle penned by the Apostolic writers, as under; thus giving the most emphatic and combined testimony of the inspired New Testament authors to the certainty of the event:—

Acts x. 42.
—— xvii. 31, 32.
Romans xiv. 10—12.
1 Corinthians iii. 13—15.
2 ———— v. 9, 10.
Galatians vi. 5, 7.
Ephesians i. 10.
———— vi. 8.
Philippians iii. 20.
———— iv. 5.
Colossians iii. 4.
1 Thessalonians iv. 13—18.
———— v. 1—4.
2 ———— i. 7—10.
1 Timothy v. 24, 25.
———— vi. 14.
2 ——— iv. 1—8.
Titus ii. 13.
Hebrews ix. 27.
———— x. 27.
James v. 7, 8.
1 Peter i. 13.
——— v. 4.
2 —— iii. 4, 7—12.
1 John ii. 28.
——— iii. 2.
2 —— 8 verse.
Jude 14, 15.
Revelations i. 9.
———— xx. 11—13.
———— xxii. 12—20.

"*Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"

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XII.

The Heavenly Crowd, beheld in Apocalyptic Visions.

GLADLY we turn our thoughts from the last great concourse of earth, its scenes of solemnity and terror, its incidents of division, disappointment, and doom; and press near the world of glory to gaze on the ransomed and resplendent concourse gathered within. Earth has been the theatre of all those clusterings of the people which have engaged our attention hitherto; we now step off from this sphere of mortal life to seek another country which is a heavenly. Amid the hosts of worlds wandering in space, amid these "many mansions" of the Divine "Father's House," there is one more beauteous far than all, more richly blessed: it is known to us by the name of Heaven, known by that name among the angels; it is the world among the myriad worlds to which Jesus went when He left

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earth, the world He has made ready for His redeemed ones, and where from the hour of His ascension He has been "gathering together in one" all His followers, and which is to be the eternal home of the purified family of God.

Stoop Thou, O Spirit Divine, and bear away our struggling thoughts to that bright region, that we may for this hour loiter near the borders of that country where the Lamb that was slain reveals His sublimest grace, and all the holy souls whom He has loved and saved in blessedness and glory dwell!

This glad fact bespeaks your notice, that there is a crowd in glory. Woeful is the thought that there are also countless multitudes in the "outer darkness," over whose doom and destiny we shudder appalled. Yet in glory there is a crowd. The Cross has not then been a failure; Christianity has wrought for great ends; the Gospel has been "the power of God unto salvation;" for look! there opens in blissful visions this scene, a heavenly crowd, and that crowd is made up of souls once dead in sins who have been ransomed and perfected by the Saviour's grace. Yes, Heaven is crowded. "Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" Listen; "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude whom no man could number." [Rev. vii. 9.] Even so; there is a crowd in heaven; "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" are there.

Does the resplendent scene, where that ransomed host is gathered, lie far away beyond the reach of our eager fancy, in secresy and seclusion; or may we lift the veil and look within, passing in happy thought "through the gates?" May we dwellers on earth from this great distance gain

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I.—*A glimpse of the place where the blessed ones are?*

We will follow the leading of the beloved John, to whom was granted a sight of that beatific world. Upborne by "one of the seven angels" of highest dignity and splendour he was "carried away to a great and high mountain;" then, on this lofty altitude, opening his spiritual eyes, lo, there gleamed forth in dazzling loveliness, pourtrayed in clearest array, "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God." [Rev. xxi. 10.] "And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." [verse 2.]

But O, how feeble is language to depict it! The lustre and charm of every manner of precious stone is made by John to do service in his endeavour to set forth its exquisite splendour, leaving the half untold. "Her light was like"—yet how vastly more brilliant and beautiful!—"a stone most precious, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." But though comparison on comparison is seized upon—first the "stone most precious," and then for its illustration of glowing warmth "a jasper stone"—yet these being inadequate, and as suggesting its vivid brightness, he adds "clear as crystal," only pausing there because his imagery was exhausted. No object memory could find was sufficiently luxuriant to tell his impression of the marvellous scene, and so the vision could be but faintly pourtrayed. Yet he indicates something of

(1) *Its magnificence;* for it has twelve gates, kept by twelve angels, each gate being of one pearl; nor were these single pearls which formed each gate of small dimensions, for they

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were set in walls great and high. The walls themselves were all built of jasper, on foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones; while the streets glowed as if paved with pure gold and looked "as it were transparent glass." (2) *Its greatness* and vast proportions; for "with a golden reed" the angel measured the city, which lies foursquare, the length being as large as the breadth, and lo, it was fifteen hundred miles long on each side, implying its capabilities of containing the most prodigious concourse. (3) *Its beauty;* for, while pearls and precious stones are used in the description to denote its grace and elegance, lo, the city as a whole seemed to John of pure gold, like unto clear glass, and "the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." (4) *Its wealth* is pourtrayed by the declaration that "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it," and that "the nations" do the same, all the riches and treasures of the whole world being thus massed together therein. (5) *Its luxuriousness* is suggested, for "he shewed me a pure river of water of life," not dank and foul, but "clear as crystal," flowing through the midst of the city, on either side of which the tree of the Lord grew, bearing fruit through all the months, the leaves of the tree of life being for "the healing of the nations." (6) *Its purity* is affirmed, for it is called "the holy city," the "holy Jerusalem;" and "there in no wise entereth anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie;" and all who dwell therein are "white and clean." (7) *Its bliss* opens to our fancy the most fascinating reverse of our human life in this dim world below, for "God shall

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wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain," "they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." "No night" shall be there, of terror, watching, and grief; no "closed gates" to bar out foes, where all is joy and peace and love; "no curse" with its toils and brow-sweatings, and heart-achings, and torturings of conscience, and remorse, and dread of God, "no more curse;" no tears therefore and no dying. O wondrous world, so sweet even to thought! On the brow of Pisgah the hoary Moses stood, and looking forth on the earthly Canaan behold, it was a scene of such beauty that the old man died happy with the sight, his spirit borne away in the ecstacy of vision. But "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." So unutterably lovely, so transcendently blissful is "the land which is very far off," the place which Jesus has gone "to prepare" for us, the home where He is collecting all those who will compose the heavenly crowd, destined to be for "ever with the Lord."

Gathered in a world so resplendent, are they who make up that blissful crowd too glorious, lofty, and pure for us "whose native sphere is dark" ever to approach, or now to know aught of? Is anything revealed of those privileged and happy spirits who dwell in the heavenly world? What may be learned of

II.—*That marvellous crowd, occupying scenes so blessed?*

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Concerning the ranks of angelic beings, rising into gradations of grandeur, with Cherubim and Seraphim, and majestic Archangel, a dazzling host of celestial intelligencies whose history is obscured from our knowledge, we have nothing now to ask. Yet know we that each is robed in form so beautiful and bears an aspect so sublime that even those most privileged souls of earth who have "entertained angels" have been overpowered by the vision when one of these lofty creatures of God has stood revealed before them. We turn our gaze from them. But what of that gleaming multitude, dazzlingly white, rapturous with song? "Who are these and whence came they?" The one answer is, "Redeemed from the earth; redeemed from among men." Our kindred, partakers of flesh and blood, children of our common humanity.

(1) Every age and clime has sent its choicest spirits to swell that crowd. They have come from far off times and widely distant lands. "Every nation and kindred and people and tongue," which has ever had a dwelling on the earth, has its representatives there. The blessed ones above are not selected exclusively from among ancient Jews and modern Christians. Can we imagine that in that heavenly crowd there will be none from amid all those great nations of antiquity which were before Christ, except the old Israelitish nation; none either, during the ages after Christ, except from among those peoples by whom the Gospel was known? Has God had no favoured children among the myriad peoples of the earth who were yet ignorant both of Moses and of Jesus? Yes indeed, "for in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of

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Him." Among peoples to whom Divine revelation in the Law and the Gospel was unknown, Jehovah has had many devout worshippers who have found their way to Him by other paths. The good, the pure, the noble, the devout, Hebrew or heathen, Christian or barbarian, earth's best and godliest sons and daughters, all will be there; divisions of race, differences of colour, and diversities of language all being lost in the brightness of that glory and oneness of that joy which will overwhelm all distinctions save this, "these were redeemed unto God and to the Lamb." Heaven's crowd is a large concourse, gathered out of all times and years, from Adam till the judgment; and from all peoples and countries, "from the east and west, the north and south," and "the uttermost parts of the sea."

(2) Through an earthly career those glorified ones had to pass before entering the city and joining the heavenly throng.

An earthly career, to a godly spirit, such as each one of the crowd was when on earth, could be no easy one. Every age has made it hard struggling to the man of heavenly aims. Every people have thrown their bitterest spite against "the pure in heart who would see God." An earthly career for a good or Christian spirit means a course of sorrow and suffering. "They that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution;" must take up their cross daily and follow Him. What! Is that resplendent crowd made up of children of earth, the brave-hearted from among us who, for conscience and for God, suffered shame and scorn, cruelty and martyrdom; called by the world fanatics, branded by churches as heretics, persecuted as blasphemers

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of popular gods or popular religions, "counted the filth of the earth, and the offscouring of all things?" Children of ignominy and hatred here; can those glorified ones be the same? O glad and marvellous the change! "These are they which came out of great tribulation." None are there who passed not through the griefs and conflicts of earth. To join that heavenly crowd, therefore, we must be followers of them who "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

(3) The Cross of Jesus gave them fitness for heaven's splendour, and secured their passage into its bliss.

When set up on Calvary, that Cross held virtue which took in the needs of the ages past as well as of present and future generations: its power to save went back to all the true and good who had ever lived beforetime in the wide world, just as it sends down to our distant age the grace of atonement and a plea with God. Among the heathen to whom Jehovah was an "unknown God," there were many who obeyed the law written by Deity on human consciences: being outside the chosen people whose were the oracles and the prophets, they could do no more than "feel after God" as souls left without heavenly light; yet in desiring to be right they succeeded as it were in "touching the hem of Christ's garments," and "as many as touched were made whole." The Hebrew nation was favoured among the ancient peoples: they had the Divine Word and a knowledge of "God's righteousness;" yet only they who "saw Christ's day and were glad," who lived by faith and died in hope, gained inheritance and a place amid the

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heavenly throng. Christian souls, privileged on earth above enlightened heathen or favoured Hebrew, with larger knowledge and more blessed experiences of the salvation of the Lord, all who proved the Saviour's grace are there, "walking with Him in white, for they are worthy." The Cross is the one source of fitness. "Redeemed from among men." "They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." O blessed Cross! "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is the song of the ransomed of the Lord below: yes, and the victor crowd in heaven gathered from all nations and climes and ages blend their joys into the same strain of adoration and love, "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation." Brothers, the Cross has opened heaven!

We are thus allowed both glimpses of the heavenly world and a knowledge of the glorified crowd. Is it given us to understand aught of

III.—*The life lived in heaven by the ransomed ones?*

We are intensely interested in this; for among that crowd there are dear souls who have gone from us, but whom our hearts cannot cease to cherish and claim. A mother's face has disappeared from our gaze on earth, gone to beam its tenderness among the blessed. And dear children who have trod our homes for awhile, like the footsteps of angels, have run from our arms away, away to the skies. And companion spirits who knew our hearts, cheered our way, walked the pilgrim's path toward heaven with us, have hurried so quickly on before us that we could not keep pace with them and so we lost sight of them, "for God took

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them." Death-bed scenes; who has not stood therein, and seen the lamp of life burn low and die into darkness? And those fond lives, gone from us, "absent from the body," resting from the labours and sorrows of earth, removed from the fellowships and ministries which here they valued and which made their careers among us so beautiful and so noble, what engages them now? Is it well to be there? "To depart and be with Christ; is it far better," even though for them to abide in the flesh seemed so needful? What is the life they live in heaven? Life is a varied and many sided thing, it is inner as well as outer, is made up of emotion as well as occupation, developes to future issues as well as exists in the present; may we then ask concerning their life in glory?

Their condition asks our notice primarily; for the tone of life depends wholly on our moral and spiritual state; and our condition morally and spiritually will determine whether our life be happy or not, happy in small or intense degree. But, cleansed from sin as the ransomed are, free from all blemishes of character or faultiness of thought or feeling, "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing," "perfect before Him in love," yea, and triumphant over every evil besetment, every charge of the "accuser of the brethren," able also to look back on an earthly career and say, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down the strong!" "we are more than conquerers through Him that loved us!"—what remains to be added to their condition in order to their life being one of utmost bliss? Sinless, stainless, with Christ, gathered to the society of the pure and happy spirits "made perfect," having come to "the general assembly, and to the Church

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of the first-born whose names are written in heaven," their complete sanctity ensures to them perfect blessedness.

(1) Their life therefore of emotion and experience can be no other than incessantly joyful. We reason on their case to this bright conclusion. But is there anything revealed which confirms this? Look at them: they bear in their hands "palms," the symbol of their own perennial peace of soul; nor palms of peace alone, but "harps," symbols again of their felicitous state and employ. Listen! no sigh, no weeping; they "sing." Nor does their singing rise with low and fitful cadence, but with a "loud voice," for their joy is full and outflowing and strong. Surely those palms and harps and songs declare that their inner life of thought and feeling, of emotion and experience, is very glad.

(2) Their life of active occupation and service must be beautiful and blissful. It was so on earth; it must be still, but intensified there. And we read, "they stand before the throne of God and the Lamb," "ever before the throne," indicating that they are always consciously in the Divine Presence, for "they see His face;" and "in His presence there is fulness of joy." We read that they "serve Him day and night in His temple," for heavenly service wearies never, and happy souls are they who stand near the gentle Lord in ministries of privilege and love. We read that they "cry, Salvation unto our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb: Alleluiah!" all marking how intense is their interest in the Divine glory, how they eagerly watch for fresh illustrations of the Infinite majesty and might of God, or new triumphs of the redeeming grace of Jesus, then celebrating all in gladdest song.

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Said the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants which stand continually before thee." But who would not be among that heavenly throng more privileged far, who minister in the presence of the glorious King, expending their eternal days in deeds which express their boundless love and joy!

There is already in heaven a countless multitude of redeemed and blessed spirits, gathered from earth into glory. What are they doing through the years now passing? *How is the interval preceding the Resurrection day being spent?* Ask we this of the sacred Book, and the answer comes:—

(a) The crowd in glory watch with eager interest through the intervening ages the incidents of earth's history. "The seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever." [Rev. xi. 15.] Later on in time, after the Divine overthow of Antichrist, "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as it were the voice of many waters, and as it were the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Halleluiah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." [xix. 6. 7.] Thus they watch and celebrate redeeming triumphs as the ages move slowly on.

(b) They invoke judgment on God's foes and rejoice over their defeat. "After these things I heard as it were a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Halleluiah; salvation and glory unto our God: for true and righteous are His judgments; for He hath judged her which

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did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand." [xix. 1, 2.] They can see the development of God's plans and the justice of His ways.

(c) They actively engage themselves in effecting the conquests of Jesus. "And the armies which are in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." [xix. 14.] That those "armies" are the ransomed of earth is evident from their attire. "These arrayed in white robes" are the spirits purified by "the blood of the Lamb." "It was given to her [the Redeemer's Church] that she should be arrayed in fine linen, white and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." [verse 8.] We see therefore that the interval is no idle one. They are marshalled together into "armies" under the Captain, to go forth with Him "conquering and to conquer." For "are they not all ministering spirits?"

(d) They loudly exult over the victories of Omnipotence and grace. They do it with "voices as of mighty thunderings:" and as John listened to that overwhelming shout rolling through the heavens he knew that it denoted not only the vastness of the exulting host, "a great voice of much people," but also the intensity of their joy; it was uncontrollable, it burst from them in deafening cries of gladness, in thundering songs. It was no dirge, no plaintive lament over the appalling destruction of God's enemies, no sad submissive cry of acquiescence. With our dim eyes, which read events so wrongly, we see much in the working out of God's plans over which to weep, and there goes up from earth the muffled note of astonishment and grief, as if

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the Almighty had dealt harshly and bitterly with men: the redeemed shout forth their song and rejoice; no sigh, no bewailing; but "Halleluiah!" for they "see the end of the Lord" and know Him good and just. "Harping with their harps" and blending joyous songs, expressive of happiness full and overflowing, thus they celebrate Divine victories and shew forth the righteousness and love which govern all God's ways with men.

In such employ as this the ransomed crowd in heaven fill up the intervening ages of human history. Then cometh the end—the resurrection, the judgment giving destiny to every soul, the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, the immortal life in the stainless home. *How*, may we conjecture, *will the heavenly crowd eternally occupy themselves?* The resurrection will perfect the condition of bliss for those who have gone before, and complete the number of the elect; and heaven will be populated! The "great City" will not be lifeless and lonely, neither will its residents dwell in isolation as those cast by wreck upon a desolate shore. The whole bearing of revelation leads us to expect a social happy life, of freest intercourse and closest ties. Surrounded by vast numbers, there can be no dreariness; engaged in noblest employ, no heart can grow weary; supplied with ceaseless cause for joy, the redeemed must have pleasures at God's right hand for evermore.

Yet let us not imagine that heaven will offer to the redeemed nothing but a crowd-life: there are few who could crave after a condition of everlasting publicity, for it would

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be destitute of retirement or repose. In a crowd our life is neither the happiest or the healthiest; there are tumult, excitement, intensity of feeling, but there is also a depressing loss of self, a surrender of individuality, an abeyance of distinctly personal experiences and joys, a being submerged in a multitude, one's own identity forfeited and consequently the forfeiture of much that forms our best and truest qualities of existence. It is an inexpressible pleasure and relief to us on earth to escape the throng and dwell apart. And in such retirement we most really live; our best life comes then into activity; our inner feelings venture forth when around us there is calm; we are natural and can be ourselves. Especially does the religious life need retirement. Heavenly society must be blessed, and contact with purified and loving souls must enlarge our joys; but we shall need solitude as much as society. And with all our human affinities, craving as we do for domestic seclusion, within whose circle our dearest joys are found, surely if we retain this noblest and most beautiful longing of our humanity, we shall group ourselves in heaven according to the affinities of spiritual sympathy and family love, and gain escape from the multitude amid the repose of closely kindred surroundings. But we may content ourselves that we are not destined to spend eternity amid a crowd. Jesus speaks of heaven as Home; the "Father's house;" within which are "many abiding places," wherein we shall dwell in dearest fellowship and devoutest bliss. The eternal years which are before Christ's ransomed ones will be full of all the most delightful recreations of pure society, the most refreshing

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ministries of unselfish love, the most hallowed communion with kindred hearts, and the most perfect services for God and the Lamb.

But the beauty of heaven itself and the raptures of its happy spirits must remain untold. There is nothing which "eye hath seen," either in the wide range of earth with its scenes of loveliness and wealth, or in the resplendent glories of the firmament where world on world sweeps in grandeur almost infinite; there is nothing "ear hath heard," not all the marvels of research, or wonders of discovery or narrations of travel; there is nothing which has ever "entered the heart of man," all the splendid creations of thought, the ravishing conceptions of fancy, the bright images of desire, the daring aspirations of poesy; nothing which can worthily be compared with the things of heaven. The glory "prepared for them that love God" is higher than thought, sublimer than faith's most rapturous vision. As we try to conceive the majesty of the "city of God," the purity of its residents, the ecstacies of their songs, their privileged employ amid eternal light and love, the human heart falters, the trembling lips grow dumb, the spirit of man acheth with infirmity, astonishment and joy paralyze thought. We may dream of it but cannot describe it.

"I know not—O! I know not
What social joys are there,
What radiancy of glory,
What light beyond compare.
And when I fain would sing them
My spirit fails and faints,
And vainly tries to image
The assembly of the saints."

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Yet the door into this bliss stands open, and Jesus invites us within! Press near the Cross; cry humbly to the Crucified; for Calvary stands in the way to heaven. And on your heart shall fall the glad assurance, "Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

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